THE Hudson REVIEW

CHARLES TOMLINSON:
Georgia O'Keeffe: A Late Greeting

CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK:
No Time for Comedy

ROGER J. PORTER:
Unspeakable Practices, Writable Acts

JANE M. MAHER:
Uncle Vinnie—a story

ALBERT HALEY:
Somewhere Is the Jungle—a story

Poems by FREDERICK MORGAN, GIORGIO CHIESURA, CE CAROL OATES, RICHARD HUGO, PATRICIA GOEDICKE.

cles and Reviews by DENIS DONOGHUE, N FLOWER, JOHN SIMON, WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD, RVIN MUDRICK, VERNON YOUNG, JAMES FINN COTTER, GEORGE S. LENSING, CHARLES W. MILLARD.

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To Our Readers

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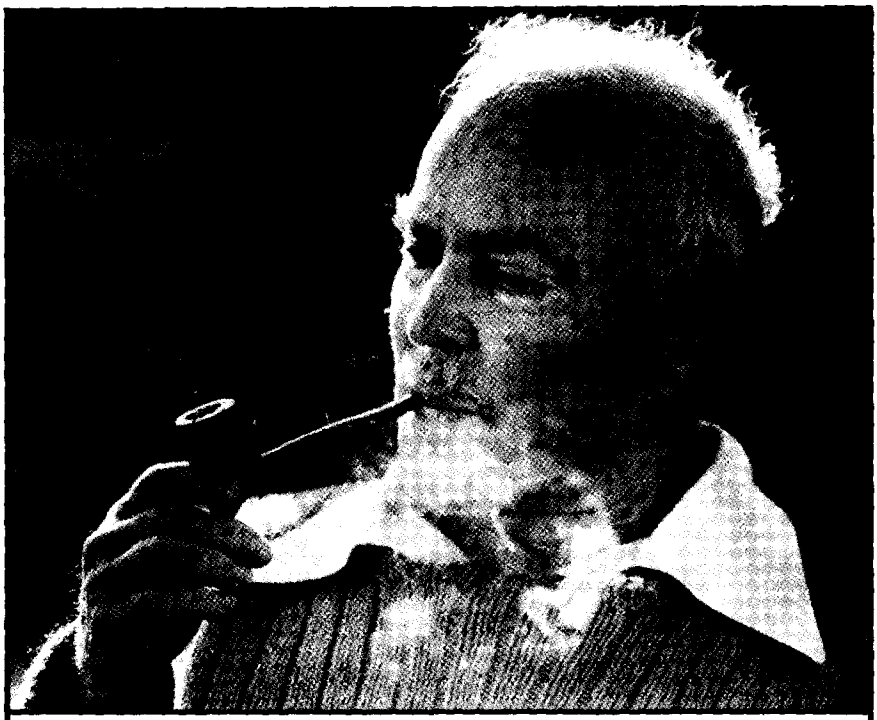

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FREDERICK MORGAN

Century Poem

for A. R. Ammons

1

When the Wheel of the century turned from light to dark
the ghost of Poe rose chattering in Baltimore
and rayed black panic over the drugged lands

the Baptist walked, with lizards in his hands

and a Sphinx upreared her head beside the White House:

Sekhet-Aaru Utchat Re
I am the child of yesterday
Cor sva jo man sprouts from slime
blood wells up through the sluice of time
Impavidum ferient ruinae

Above the central plains the sky turned silver
with cyclones simmering from a sensitive source
and blood rained down on Topeka with fish and frogs

The President became a vegetarian

and the Sphinx half-smiled, as a bat crawled from her mouth
unlimbered its black sails
and sported in the Washington air with the President's helicopter—
meanwhile, the gentlemen of the Highway Lobby got down on all fours
like little elephants in a chain
and crawled one by one nose first into the brown
Potomac (already heavily polluted)

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—Tell on, my song, the *annus mirabilis*!
Eggs and pale blood on the peaks of Oregon
old yellow women back-packing in Death Valley
and a limbo of fog on the starved manufacturing towns
soot of Wilmington, slough of Newark
Jersey chemical dumps and Massachusetts mills

The Specter walked . . . .

and walks the quiet hills
of a lost Connecticut, calm summers of the past
undying dreams, unfailing faces, as memory holds fast
in full elation of the Sphinx's glare

I shall not speak my murders to this air . . .

In Vermont a stone-age tribe shambled down from the Green Mountains—
bloat-skulled, chalk-faced, mumbling an unformed speech
they massacred the retired professors, ate cows raw in the fields

2

The ghost of Poe sang "*Muley muley*
I love Lenore, I love her truly
Dauntless I seek my lost Lenore
through the dim streets of Baltimore"

The doubleghost sang "*Mene penny*
I love her not, I love not any
Quenchless I follow, near and far
my lost god Monsieur Valdemar"

A chess-player of steel, seven storeys tall in front of the Plaza
(his head was planted with a small rock-garden)
mated Bobby Fisher on a King's Indian and swallowed him alive—

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a thousand golden hawks appeared in the blue air of New York
and proceeded to decimate the pigeon population
(to the delight of Miss Farida X. Wiley)
while in the Museum of Natural History
strange movements were reported from the back corridors:
scorpions of glass, vanessids of pure copper
exchanging curt messages at ultra-high frequencies
proconsuls stirring in the furry dark
mouthing dull syllables, summoning back to flesh
the starvelings of old evil Olduvai—
everywhere, manifestations of an intention
(*whose* intention is not to be revealed)
in shrieks of skittish school-children tricked out in parrot feathers
in tinglings of the brontosaurus bones
in the solemn stride of statues heaving their borrowed breaths

. . . And from the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral
the ghost of Cardinal Spellman, naked and obese
displayed its bloated buttocks to the ranks of passing veterans

(An Angel saw it from on high
poised in the sky above the Chrysler Building—
a six-winged smiler with corundum eyes)

3

. . . There's a whisper of yellowy-green on the trees in Central Park
the half-breed lovers wait for dark
the birds sing *ki-ri-ki* and *koo-roo-koo*

Gold chessmen litter the floor of the Stock Exchange

and Poe's ghost scours the streets of Baltimore
in search of his cousins of latter days

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in search of the wraith-white blouse of his lost Lenore
(in search of that sinister frog Monsieur Valdemar, what's more)

And the beggars have taken over in California—
with mouths full of orange they bugger the Hollywood starlets
and ride bare-assed on starving desert nags
Disaster! What new star swirls over Palomar
injecting its hyaline rays into the palaver of astronauts:
Col. Glenn, Col. Armstrong, Col. Teilhard de Chardin
Col. Tolstoy, Col. Gandhi, Col. Guillaume Apollinaire
Col Grossefesse, Col Baise-mon-cul—what star
sings glitter-tongued the lotus lands of space?

On Planet X the dawns move sluggish
up from the steaming chlorine seas
The people wave their fibrous arms
in infraspectral harmonies

On Planet X they take their sex
unmixed with love's frivolities
In violet gloom their mighty mergings
quell all at once the mind's unease

In a New York of the twenties, in a flat near Washington Square
after engaging in perverse forms of intercourse
Justine in her mask hears the quiet song of the planets
ah lah ah lah ah looooo
and tastes the desire of the boy who yearns for the Green Star
high, high in the tingling night above One Fifth Avenue

. . . The raggy men are dreaming on park benches
Snow falls on Washington Arch
flake
flakelet
flake

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4

Cor sva jo The winged ones built their palaces of skulls
in California parceled into lots
while Liszt's Les Preludes brayed out over the housing projects
and the lord with zircon cuffs at his piano
tinkled a nocturne to the fiberglass flowers

In Houston, in the Astrodome
the Werewolves played the Frankensteins
The Franks touched down a hundred times
stomping and crushing wolfish bones

The bleeding fiends shrieked black despair
which stopped the monsters in their tracks
A hundred heads were wrenched from necks
sailed through the murk to tie the score

And from across the Rio Grande a living slime
uneasy, putrescent invaded the plains of Texas—
a porridge of eyes and dismembered parts, a scum of yelping mouths
it devoured the oil-men and ranchers and their expensive sons and daughters

The President, attempting to cope with the situation
convoked in Washington an assembly of eminent Poets:
for three days (all expenses paid) they met and mumbled
choice passages from their Collected Shirts and Selected Warts
and Mr. Rockefeller demanded the Baptist's head on a platter
to be reproduced in majestic enlargement at the top of Number One World Trade Center
whence, gazing out across the harbor—
this was all in the interests of American Democracy, of course—
it might be expected to exchange intelligence with the Statue of Liberty
(while at the top of Number Two a pallid bust was revealed)

The Congress then, in solemn session, voted itself a raise

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the President read Longfellow, regretting the old ways
the Sphinx flew to New Mexico to fast for forty days

(the Poets had no answers
but awarded one another nevertheless the customary medals and prizes)

and the Atlantic rolled its breakers on the Carolina shores
the Atlantic full of jellyfish and molluscs
the Atlantic rolled its breakers on the broken coast of Maine—
the ghost of Poe went floating, dreaming in the rain

5

A friendly rubber at the Whist Club
Valdemar trumps Poe's hopeless ace
The black cat on the bust of Pallas
frets with his tail the marble face

Poe bears his disappointment staunchly
courteously he quits the game
Meanwhile Maria spreads her haunches—
this time a Raven takes the blame

And dancing dancing dancing on the mall in Central Park
three naked girls outfling arms breasts and thighs
black red and blonde their pubic hair
Alice and Cynthia and Lenore—
a few children watch, a mounted policeman, with benevolence—
for the moment the sun is shining, it is warm in the city
as dwarfish sails speckle the glinting ponds

Yes, I have seen the lost Lenore
Long-haired she walks nocturnal streets
holding two afghans on a leash
She's fair, she hasn't all her wits

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And a soi-disant Christ is born in New Mexico, in the desert
spawned of the Sphinx and Valdemar the Raven—
he feeds the ghosts of old prospectors on cactus milk
he picks up lizards in his hands and lets them go again
stakes out no claims, seeks out no souls
cries "Back to hell, man!" to the ghost of Cardinal Spellman
and has never been half in love with easeful death . . .
He drinks pure broth, he draws pure breath
signs a compact of friendship with the people of Acoma Pueblo
watches admiringly the girls swinging topless in the bordertown bars
writes good-humored letters to the Editor of The New York Times
and when Angels drift in on cloud-banks from the north
glides up beside them in his shimmering shirt

6

Be careful, ladies and gentlemen, or you may be hurt—
everything these days is not what it seems
(as you very well know) including the warning signs
so pay no attention to this poem, no attention at all

The wheel moves on regardless, night and day
and if you're on it, you have to go its way—
no one's making you hold on though, so why not try letting go?

. . . It was just off Madison Avenue the message came
one May afternoon, the specter walking beside me
appeased for a moment by delicacies of Spring—
an Angel brought it; small, female, rather French-looking
dressed in high fashion, wearing a tourmaline
she stopped on the sidewalk smiling and handed me a telegram

With respect to your understanding of the universe
this is to inform you that there seem to be many errors
imbedded in your habitual ways of thinking and feeling

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In certain areas things are better than you allow
in others they are much worse

For Angels, Sphinxes, Pterodactyls and so forth the outlook is quite favorable
The World of Ideas is expected to survive
and the mineral realm as well, falling back on its old transmutations—
but as for the rest!
Try thinking of something else
like why it should be necessary for you to think at all
this very day and moment

No answer was expected—
or desired?

Sunlight on pavement emptiness of forms
above the Chrysler Building the sky still highly attentive
as a thousand cities eloquent in their absence
renewed these trumperies of human touch . . .

No answer was forthcoming—that much is plain—
but the angel was a changeling, and remains

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

Georgia O'Keeffe: A Late Greeting

THE ENVELOPE WAS ADDRESSED in a strong hand which might have been masculine. The dictionary defines calligraphy as elegant penmanship. This was certainly calligraphy, but it was forceful rather than elegant, and the diagonal "Do Not Bend," with its firmly scalloped underlining like an ideogram for "choppy sea," proclaimed authority. No one had bent the contents of the envelope despite its ample size. The card within carried the message "A late greeting/I hope it reaches you" and the monogram "G.O'K." Georgia O'Keeffe's Christmas card—or was it a New Year greeting?—had been mailed on January 20, 1964 and arrived in England in time for spring, having been readdressed from Albuquerque where we were no longer residents. The illustration consisted of one of her early water-colours, *Starlight Night* of 1917, scarcely a couple of years after Alfred Stieglitz's discovery of her with his celebrated remark, "Finally a woman on paper." It was the sort of starlight night you might find six thousand feet above sea level in the crystalline air of Abiquiu, New Mexico, from where the card had been mailed.

This was the second postal communication I had received from Miss O'Keeffe—always "Miss O'Keeffe," never "Mrs Stieglitz" ("Why should I take on someone else's famous name?"). The first time—before we had met—it had been a Western Union Telegram: "Please come Sunday at eleven for lunch." That unexpected summons to the high village forty miles north of Santa Fe in January 1963 marked a stage on a journey that had begun seventeen years before—also in January—when Donald Reid had sent me (it was my nineteenth birthday) *An Illustrated Handbook of Art History.* In a post-war England not rich in exotic books and in Blackpool, not conspicuous for its bookshops, the unaccountable presence of Frank J. Roos, Jr.'s compilation had caught his eye. What caught mine, on receiving it, was the unknown quantity, American art. Thus, when long afterwards I came to read Lowell's poem "For the Union Dead," Saint-Gaudens' Shaw Memorial which is in ques-

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tion there, was no stranger to me, though I had never seen it in the flesh, or more exactly, in the bronze.

Not that the Saint-Gaudens had ever made for me a forceful image. What held the eye was the outline of American painting—Homer, Ryder, Eakins, then (approaching the present) Marin, three Demuths and a single O'Keeffe, *The Mountain.* This last, indifferently reproduced like all the plates, two by three inches and in monochrome, entered one's meditations. In it, all the sinews of the mountain stood revealed. It seemed to have heaved upwards and fallen sideways like a sleeper who has just turned over. And yet, it was not in any way personified. The colours, reduced uniformly to grey, except for some darker tree shapes and was it the sky above or a larger mountain containing this smaller one?—the colours could have been those of ice or fire. What the printing could not eliminate was the firm articulation of the musculature, the rock-thrust, the held declivities, the sense of an even light bringing the whole to bear. This was my first glimpse of the landscape of New Mexico, although I had no way of identifying the place or the painter. Indeed, *The Mountain* was flanked by Eugene Speicher's *Portrait of a Girl* which memory misread as *Portrait of an Irish Girl*, so that for years I carried with me this quite erroneous picture of O'Keeffe. More profitably, I came to associate *The Mountain* with Marianne Moore's poem *An Octopus,* where an entire mountain mass is "gone over" with its octopus of ice on top " 'Creeping slowly as with meditated stealth,/its arms seeming to approach from all directions.' " So evidently it was ice-colour the grey reproduction had suggested. Wrong again, but the wrongness scarcely injured the picture of the landscape it essentialized although both were the colour of fire. The form rode in the mind unimpaired until it was to blaze back at me from the outside at a first sight of the Sangre de Cristo mountains abrupt above the New Mexican desert.

"Please come Sunday at eleven for lunch." It seemed a generous invitation. Whoever heard of going to lunch until twelve thirty? I had not expected such a wide margin for talk. To begin with, I had expected very little. For whenever I had raised the question of trying to see O'Keeffe, people had shaken their heads. "You will find it difficult to get in. She sees very few except her friends." Yet the desire persisted. Having carried that image in one's head for the better part of twenty years, having come through it to an as-

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pect of modern painting one's countrymen had never inspected, one had perhaps earned a meeting. It was my friend, the poet Winfield Townley Scott, who brought it about. I had been admiring a book of photographs of ghost towns in his house at Santa Fe. The photographer was Todd Webb—"a close friend of O'Keeffe's," as Win added. I reiterated my half-forlorn hope. "I'll call him for you and see what he suggests." The next thing I knew, a week later, was that I had in my hand a telegram from the great lady.

That winter had been relatively mild. There had been snow and sleet on Christmas Eve, but one had driven with comparative ease, though through clinging mud, to Mass at the pueblo church of San Felipe. After the service, there had been dancing, the dancers entering at the huge west door preceded by the soft-timbred music of their ankle bells, their coyote yelps sharp on the snowy air. One was aware of the vast space behind them, and then the explosion of a Kiowa war dance, all energy and feathers, blotted it back into the cold night as six drummers and chorus accompanied the dancers into the resonating church. Christmas Day saw deep, brilliant snow. Then the weather turned kind once more. A week before the visit to Abiquiu I sat in warm sun watching the deer and antelope dances on the plaza of Cochiti pueblo. It seemed like summer and the whole ceremony took on a mesmerically summery glow to the beat of a single drum. The light sought out the white tunics and the red head-bands of the line of male dancers in their doe-skin boots. The two Deer Mothers, one at either end of the line, flared in red blouses, the left shoulder bare, turquoise round their necks, a trailing of head-feathers, black kirtles, white puttees. Under the full sun of morning, the two women advanced from the line of dancing men to be met by two deer—male dancers whose forelegs were completed by their bending over on sticks. They moved in fascinated dependence on the Deer Mothers, behind them two bright-blanketed priests. The Deer Mothers drew them without noticing them, with solemn, lowered eyes and an impersonal, sexless dignity. In their hands they carried bunches of feathers and the deer imitated their circular gestures with identical motions of the neck. The weather was part of the ceremony—a slow hypnosis of pulsating sunlight. But it wouldn't last.

The day before I set out for Abiquiu followed a night below zero in the Albuquerque valley. Someone going home drunk had entangled himself in barbed wire and frozen to death. The next night

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would be even colder, we were told, and it was—down to thirty below, just north of Santa Fe; and at Albuquerque, the breath-taking rareness of snow air and snow light in a snow-bound city.

The car was immoveable. Even had it been otherwise, who could say what the weather would be like at Abiquiu? Thirty below. But that was at Tesuque. Also north of Santa Fe. But Abiquiu lay further to the west. One would be late at all events. The generosity of "come at eleven" put one in the wrong from the start. But what was the use of going back and forth over the situation? The weather was immovable, too. The air seemed to encase one in a suit of ice. There was not even a whisper from the car battery. Other cars stood on their driveways like stranded boats. The streets were empty.

But one had failed to take into account the desert sun. Once it was above the mountains, the snow began to melt until it lay only in the shadows, a white geometry at the edges of buildings reproducing gables and roof lines on the shining black streets. The immoveable car was dragged, pushed, coaxed into motion, coughed a little, jerked, came unjammed, faded dangerously, was forced back into life by a diligent foot. It was impossible to get there by eleven if one could get there at all. But the car was moving, the snow was sliding off the roofs, the way through town was clear, and out into the desert the paved highway shone and steamed as the sun drew off its snow. The oranges and reds of the desert were seeping back now through the retreating white. Water sang and flashed through the *arroyos* under the road. The sun was feeling once more for the shapes of the immense arid landscape in which the wet from the snowfall had flushed up the dusty colours like water thrown over a mosaic floor. Among the ghostly greys of the winter cottonwood trees, behind the tin-roofed adobes, along the banks of the snow-filled Rio Chama, everything flared and glittered, sending up mica showers, crossing blades of light. Light that had been snow. Snow that underscored the reefs of orange rock. It was the dance of fire and ice. The tall blue of the sky was re-established, though even the sun could not entirely blunt the sharpened air.

Abiquiu, or Santo Tomás Apostel de Abiquiu, lies twenty miles from the town of Española. Before Highway 84 was paved it must have seemed fifty. Within living memory the journey there and back took at least three days, and coming to each *arroyo,* a wagon would need to be unloaded and re-loaded on the further bank. The

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story is told by Gilberto Benito Cordova[1] of the horse-drawn wagon stuck and abandoned in El Arroyo de Oso. Two cousins, inhabitants of Abiquiu, approaching the spot from opposite directions, began an extended argument about the wagon's real colour, finally threatening each other with physical violence. The son of the cousin who had approached from the Abiquiu side tried the experiment, while the argument was at its height, of tickling one of the horses under its tail with his stick, the result being that the team suddenly started forwards and freed the cart, revealing that each side of it was painted a different colour.

Abiquiu still seems set apart. It consists of the crumbling remains of an eighteenth-century settlement of Genizaros, that is Hispanicized Indians of mixed tribal origins. The word is an etymological relation of the Turkish "janissaries"—Christians turned into Islamic soldiers by the Turks. The car slithering into the muddy ruts of the village street, found its way by a kind of instinct to a long, low wall behind which sheltered a long, low house, to a gateway adorned by an immense deer skull complete with branching antlers. It brought to mind O'Keeffe's painting, *From the Faraway Nearby* where the sky is filled with a horned, floating skull, behind it the empty blue, and bare desert hills beneath. Evidently one had come to the right place. Bone by adobe. When I admired the trophy at the gate later that afternoon, she replied, "I swapped a hi-fi set for it."

I expected a tall woman. She was a vigorous seventy-six, rather small of stature, with a mild but incisive voice, the incisiveness toning the mildness of its sound with a strength that could take itself for granted. She talked readily, easily. She smiled frequently with reconnaissant eyes, so that the lined face of the photographs with its thin fine eyelids, possessed an animation that photography in freezing banishes. One saw why Stieglitz had taken his five hundred pictures of her, realising the practicable part of that dream of his of a photographic portrait that ideally should start with birth, follow out a life to death and then begin once more with the child of the subject. I was late and I expected her to be displeased, but that day all her guests had arrived late—Todd Webb with his wife, and a granddaughter of Mabel Dodge Luhan with her husband. We had been talking of the great cold when O'Keeffe said to me in

[1] *Abiquiu and Don Cacahuate: A Folk History of a New Mexican Village* (San Marcos Press, 1973).

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the same voice with which she spoke of the weather, "You got in on false pretences. I am not friendly. I thought you were a friend of Todd Webb's." I had just met Todd Webb for the first time. The eyes seemed to acknowledge that she was half-joking. I wasn't sure. In retrospect, she seems merely to have been stating the truth of the matter. But neither was she *un*friendly now that I'd "got in."

The house was a rambling adobe. The room in which we sat talking, and the adjoining room in which we ate, were painted a stark white. Black vases from San Ildefonso pueblo contained grey twigs, flowerless. She, also, wore black, a masculine-looking trouser suit, and later, when we went outside, a thick black leather coat. On tables and ledges animal bones of various sizes, stones very smooth and rounded. Dark furniture against white walls, an adobe-coloured mud floor. Under low vigas two Chinese statues, two African masks, no O'Keeffes, no Stieglitz. There was a warren of smaller rooms. They had formerly been used as pig-pens, being abandoned as the roofs fell in and then locked. She had bought the derelict house from the church, renovating the rooms one by one and having built in each a differently sized fireplace to burn the aromatic *piñon* wood. The rooms had been plastered by local women. "They do the work best," she said, "They did the whole house. Every inch of its surface has been touched by a woman's hand. Now I have to think about the outside. Four years of rainy weather, and the adobe is melting away."

We ate well. Beef, salad, water-grown tomatoes, pickled onions and curry, prepared by Amelia, her helper; ice cream which she had made herself and apologised for; mangoes which she had never served previously, red wine, coffee. Assisting in carrying out the dishes, one caught sight through the kitchen window of the enfiladed mesas commanding their orange, juniper-stippled spaces with, in the foreground, on the kitchen table, a giant, black grinding-stone, a *matata,* that had come from Amelia's grandmother.

Conversation had been easy and unforced at table, but it had been general, and some of it impenetrably local, so that I had the feeling that I had not really been speaking to *her,* that perhaps this was the wages of false pretences. One item of local talk lodged in my ear. It concerned the Indian husband of Mabel Luhan who, as he lay on his deathbed, kept reiterating, "I want to go to the rodeo at Cimarrón. Why don't somebody take me there?" As the others drifted back to the arm chairs, O'Keeffe unexpectedly drew me

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aside and over to the further side of the dining table: "And now let's talk. And let me say first of all how much I admire your green English tweed. What a marvellous material."

We began by talking of the cubists. She had known them early and admired Braque. Was that because of the 1913 Armoury Show? No. She had known them before. She had seen them at Mr. Stieglitz's gallery (she invariably referred to him as "Mr. Stieglitz") in an elegant but plain brownstone house—Picasso and Braque drawings, and other things one would wish to see when young, including African things. "I had no great passions," she continued, "I went my own way. I didn't even intend to 'live' by painting because there's the danger that you'll try to copy the style of someone else and 'work' it." No, she didn't care for Constable, but loved Turner; hadn't, in fact, known many English people except for Gerald Heard. Thought England would be too green for her like Virginia where she had lived for a time. She had toured France—Chartres, Vézélay, Autun; Chartres with its big windows "like being under trees." "I think the architecture is the greatest achievement of the church—finer than the frescoes, finer than Ravenna." I wanted to ask about Sheeler and Demuth but she spoke more of the city, of New York, in the twenties. "It was the end of brownstone Park Avenue (where you walked when you had a cold). As the skyscrapers took over, high and separate, they made you feel they'd fall on you." We talked a good deal of Abiquiu. "It's like living in a novel. Why, there's a mother here who won't let her child have a hearing aid because she's afraid it'll make his hearing worse." Most of all she spoke of Joe, the Spanish boy, now twenty, she'd been "bringing on." "I've had him get his teeth fixed and scraped. I give him brewer's yeast and molasses and it's improved his complexion and made him stand straight. And, after brewer's yeast, he works better. He's great with cars. He bought an old school bus for twenty dollars when he was eighteen—learned to fix and unfix it, and now he's an expert. I signed for him when he made a down payment on a truck. His uncle and grandfather would have paid off the installments if Joe couldn't, but they wouldn't *sign* anything."

Joe was to be in demand that afternoon. The other two guests had departed, Todd Webbs's car wouldn't start. So O'Keeffe asked me to drive her to Joe's place, an adobe house beyond the village, in search of the mechanic. "I go with him," she said, "into the

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mountains to find watercress. I always find the best, but I'm hoping to teach *him* to find it to save myself." The afternoon was advancing and deep blue shadows gathering under the mesas and in the fractures of the rocks, bringing everything to a pitch of vivid abstraction in the sinking light. "The clarity, that's what I love about this place," she said, as we took in the lengthening, sharp shadows. "A pity," she went on, "there's no time for you to see my ghost ranch. It's sixteen miles up-country. You'd like the landscape there." I asked her if it was there she first began painting cattle bones. Her reply was, "You know why I began painting cattle bones? I used to come here summers, and the question was what to take back to New York which would recall New Mexico. I would have taken flowers, but at the height of summer flowers were scarce. So I took bones and painted them."

I had noticed that at least once she had painted bones and flowers together in *Summer Days* of 1936. Earlier still, in *Blue and Green Music* of 1919, a much more abstract picture, there was a similar confrontation of growth with death. This picture was fresh in my mind, since I had been examining a slide of it on the previous evening. Out of a concourse of rigid embattled triangles, there emerges, in mid-canvas, a billowing as if wind-torn area of whitish flame. It resembles, in its involved flickerings and flarings, the unravelling petals of a flower or the skins of an onion bulb. And there, crowning this spectral conflagration, one makes out the pun of a skull shape, squashed sideways, Holbein-wise, like the anamorphosis at the foot of his picture, *The Ambassadors.* The whole is immaculately painted, a kind of mask of white death invading the formalised humanism of the cubists. I asked her in the car about this invasion. "No, I've never seen a skull there," she replied quietly as though pondering the matter, as though there *might* be a skull there, but unwilling to commit herself to one: "I didn't *know* there was a skull there."

Joe was not in. Joe's brother was, and would send Joe over when he re-appeared. We drove back. "When Joe goes into the army," she said with decision, "I aim to try and bring on his brother."

It was getting late and cold and I had to start. First she insisted on showing the rest of the house with its whitewashed adobe fireplaces and Navajo rugs. Then she said in a tone that sounded like Miss Moore's, "I'll offer you tea before going, but I refuse to offer you alcohol." Almost her last remark was, "When you return to

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New Mexico, you must come in." Come in? It was an unexpected turn of phrase. "I am not friendly," I recalled, but friendly she *had* been, and "come in" suggested a full absolution from my false pretences, the cordial opposite of "get in."

Whenever New Mexico re-enters the mind, it comes in images that are hers and images that are not hers. One which is hers and which I can see clearly with shut eyes is *Red Hills and Bones* of 1941 with its dry vistas, the hill humps with their deep, parched wrinkles full of shadow. Here, a vision that in *Blue and Green Music* flickers with the underpresence of the skull, grows calm, and the discarded fragments of an animal's skeleton that lie across the foreground of the picture do so in repose, in stillness and light, from the exquisitely segmented spine of the foreground skeleton, through the ghosts of the autumnal chamiso bushes behind to the barrenness of hill and rock mesa. What is missing from the hills and what I saw against the sky on the long drive back that night rising from the heaped-up boulders, is a Penitente cross. That image also belongs to her, or to one aspect of her work. For, the first summer she was able to pass entirely in New Mexico, that of 1929, saw the painting of *Black Cross, New Mexico,* where the shape of a huge Penitente cross dominates the recession of treeless, rounded hills, the red and yellow bars of the sunset imprisoned between its arms and the horizon of purple land. This black cross held together by four massive nails, and the blood-coloured sunset beneath it, evoke the ascetic and tragic spirit of Los Hermanos de la Luz, offshoot of the Third Order of St. Francis—the New Mexico of the Penitente chapels, the *moradas* where Death armed with bow and arrow sits waiting in its wooden cart. In another picture, *Cross by the Sea, Canada* of 1932, the cross is identical with those one finds in any of the small Spanish *camposantos* of New Mexico, the fence around it resembles precisely the fence of carved wooden pickets, *cuna* or *cerquita,* which surrounds a grave. The image that is not hers is the image of the Indian dance—behind her crosses rises the *morada*, not the church of San Felipe with its explosion of drums and feathers, or the dancing plaza where the drum beat intercedes between heart-beat and sun-beat and unites them. One critic speaks of *Red Hills and the Sun* of 1927 as "nature imbued with a pantheistic, transcendent life of its own." The formula seems an improbable one for O'Keeffe, though it is not a new one, something like it already appearing in the review in *Camera Work* which

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greeted her first exhibition at Stieglitz's "291" gallery in 1917. If pantheism means anything, it is unitive like the communion of blood-beat and drum-beat. O'Keeffe's is a separating vision giving her space in which to contemplate the thing before her. The magnified flower paintings and the abstracted interiors of *Jack-in-the-pulpit* in its several versions, though they are symbols for processes that involve and transcend the self, lack the oceanic engulfment of Jackson Pollock's early Indian-inspired totemic pictures and his later kinship with the Navajo sand painters pouring their images. They remain oddly literal in their strangeness and isolation, as irreducible as the black rock that fills three quarters of the canvas of *Black Rock with Blue* of 1970, like one of Magritte's magnified apples, though there is nothing here to indicate its actual scale or whether, indeed, it is magnified. The blue it bulks against is that which long ago she saw in all its intensity through the holes in held-up pelvis bones, and of which she wrote during the war ". . . that Blue that will always be there as it is now after all man's destruction is finished."

She discovered herself during one war and has long survived a second. She was born in the same year as Miss Moore, 1887, a year before Eliot, two after Pound, four after Williams. At ninety one, she is the last survivor of the great generation. All of these poets had read their Fenollosa. And she, along with Pound, owed much of the direction of her career to his having written. Two statements:

> "This man had one dominating idea: to fill space in a beautiful way."
>
> "We find that all art is harmonious spacing under special technical conditions that vary."

The first is O'Keeffe speaking of Arthur Wesley Dow whose book *Composition* and whose teaching methods introduced the ideas of Fenollosa into American art-schools. The second quotation is from Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* and it summarises what he had been saying in the face of a prevailing academicism ever since he had returned from Japan to become, first, Curator of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1895 and then a popular lecturer. O'Keeffe gave up painting in 1912 but in the summer of that year returned to it under the influence of Alon Bement, a follower of Dow's. In 1914–15 she went, persuaded by Bement, to study

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with Dow in New York, and again in the spring of 1916. Simultaneously she was discovering the Southwest, teaching near Amarillo in Texas. It was at this moment that the spaces of Fenollosa and the spaces of the desert, of East and West, met in a ground for new harmonies, new dissonances. The stone garden of Ryōanji, the red cliffs of Tomieka Tessai, Hiroshige's red strip of sunset, waited to be rediscovered in America, in Abiquiu. As China's sacred mountain, Taishan, had redeclared its form to an American mind from the mountains beyond the detention camp at Pisa.

"When you return to New Mexico, you must come in." I have returned to New Mexico twice since then, but I have not "come in." The first time was four years later and the visit was rushed, the second was thirteen and I imagined she would scarcely remember. Perhaps I should have risked it. She hadn't known many Englishmen, and she still recalled Gerald Heard in 1963. Perhaps there is still time. I have written these pages as, in some sense, a late greeting.

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RICHARD HUGO

Duntulm Castle

1

Those knights had an eye for strategic location.
One look at the sea and they knew the way danger
would come. What better than this, the ocean open
all the way to the sky. Only one island nearby,
Tulm, and that with no cover. In this harmless
dramatic weather, what better place to wonder
what I would have been, cook or castle clown
or knave who stole out of need, a captive in the dungeon
scratching on stone one more year of the hundreds
I lost dying of slow darkness.

2

If you hear anything bad about me, believe it.
Given a choice, I'd be crofter, friend to anyone.
To the army that went out and the other army
that came back I'd wave the same good luck
and go on turning the dirt and planting. Time
for conscription, I'd say: look, without me, no food.
I'd manage to always stay here, my world cut short
by the stone fence I must not plant beyond.
Think anything you want in your castle
perfecting good manners. Old as I am, something
happens inside when gannets collapse their wings
and free fall into the waves like dead stars.
I excuse myself from wars.
You stand before me ferocious in armour and mail
and ridicule when I tell you the raven comes here
because damn it all he's a raven and this
is a castle in ruin. Sure, I'm afraid of your sword,
your unforgiving eyes. Haven't I begged
and begged at your gate for scraps in bad winters?

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3

The same two herons flew the same formation then.
To me, that's fun. To knights it meant spies
and a means of attack they'd not counted on.
Did I tell you I've flown and dropped bombs?
Buildings looked like you do now then.
I was handsome in my uniform.
That's about the time you gave the traitor
salted beef and salt water and laughed him dead of thirst.
I wish I was poet enough to hear his final gasp
from the dungeon, and man enough to admit it's just me.

4

Hard wind hates imagination. I come from a land
where without half trying we create
a thousand reasons to say goodbye. In this wind
I'm afraid to lean over the rim and watch the babe
fall inadvertently bye bye into the sea,
the nurse beside me begging "Don't tell them"
and the same nurse below tied to the prow
by her hair and tide coming in for an all time high.
Don't tell them over tea at the Duntulm Hotel.
I'm the one who told.

5

Once a year a poet came
on foot over the moor.
He read and they listened hard.
Year after year he came,
every time a little more welcome,
a little more polished.
In time he ate with the knights
and had his choice of the women.
Gradually, he relaxed.
One day he read a poem
that sang a way to get here

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no knight had considered.
They banished him to Tulm.
Gulls took his bones
and one by one
dropped them into the sea.
So help me.

The Clouds of Uig

for Johan Ross

Over the years these clouds have coloured much
cloud white and blue: horse, house and fence,
the recent tower already in ruin.
They change the green of Skye apple to Kelly
and back a hundred times a day.
They never stop changing the distance to the pier
from your front door.

They have no form. No one would mistake
the shade of one on water for a boat.
They never slow down and they never run out.
When one sky leaves, taking with it the rain
that couldn't make anyone wet or leave grass
dry very long, another sky follows close behind,
the loud blue interval between. . . .
recess in a crowded school.

They move on like your students, sixty years
of them and still they come
like surly children, like amorphous rules of light
we can't quite understand and have to obey.
A new set of rules this minute, faintly the same.
We can live under them.
They move certain as blood. Under their shade
the bay locks complete and, deep in that cloudy water,
many lives go on.

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JOYCE CAROL OATES

Moving Out

There is much work to be done before we leave:
vacuuming, mopping, scrubbing, scouring:
the remorseless sorting of trash.

In the emptied house our footsteps clatter.
Our shadows veer across unfamiliar walls.
We have been toiling for days to detach ourselves,
To take leave, and to properly mourn.

What to make of these puzzles, old handmade gifts
quaint and dusty with love?
—How to cherish, how to honor
and discard, and feel no grief—
How to throw out outlived clothes.
How to clean house.

How to move out.
How to deal with dried cattails plucked from a jubilant
  Sunday afternoon,
and files of letters, a din of hurt voices,
debris of eighteen years.
Manila envelopes stuffed with snapshots.
Small bewildered smiles squinting against the sun.

There is much work to be done before we leave,
though the house sighs now with emptiness.
And somewhere water gushes hot and angry from a faucet.
The house is clean, but not clean enough.
It must be readied for the new tenants.
Steel wool, sponges, buckets, mops.
There are hours of work ahead, most of a night,
why did we think we were nearly finished?

For an instant I see everything clearly:
it has something to do with light reflected

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in one window reflected in another.
It has something to do with quick footsteps overhead
as I have never heard them before.
The house will outlive us!
I will never be deceived again!

But the moment passes, like any other.
The faucets gush. We toil, we labor, loveless.
We will work through the night, the lights burning.
The house is a witness that must be effaced.

Leavetaking

The house is empty, nearly.
It thinks nothing now, it has given away its secrets
cheaply.

Room after room, the blankness of walls.
Bare hardwood floors, a reproach.

The ceilings rise. Crickets sound in corners.
Window panes glare as if someone were peering in.

The house has a past and a future
but no present.
You can feel its anger.

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CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK

No Time for Comedy

A LONG TIME AGO, back at the beginning of literature, Achilles got angry. Out of that came destruction, for enemy and friend. Odysseus, on the other hand, kept his cool; he got to eat his cake and have it too. The Iliad and the Odyssey are the fundamental narratives of Western consciousness, even for those who have not read them: two masks, two modes, two stances; minor chord and major; two primary ways of meeting experience. The Iliad sets the type of tragedy, as Aristotle tells us, where greatness shines amid violence, error, defeat, and mortality. The Odyssey celebrates survival among the world's dangers and surprises, and then homecoming, and order restored. It is the very archetype of a prosperous outcome, of Comedy.

Comedy? Laughs are not the point. It is that primary sense of comedy that Dante explained to his patron:

> It differs, then, from tragedy in its content, in that tragedy begins admirably and tranquilly, whereas its end or exit is foul and terrible . . . whereas comedy introduces some harsh complication, but brings its matter to a prosperous end. . . . And hence it is evident that the title of the present work is "the Comedy."

Evident from the Inferno's first lines, in which Dante tells us what he means to do: to give account of the *good* he found in that dark and harsh and savage wood where he had lost the straight way.

Tragedy and Comedy: the masks are two. Iliad and Odyssey go together, and not only as they trip off the tongue. One requires the other. A reading of Homer which stops with the lament for Hector must be in every sense partial. As surely as we experience the Iliad in the knowledge that Achilles will die and Troy will fall, we must experience it in the awareness that there is another kind of story to be told, that Odysseus will survive the war and the journey and make it home.

Tragedy and Comedy: though the words are paired, their order is not reversible. We do not speak of Comedy and Tragedy, or Odyssey and Iliad. "To make a sombre action end happily is easy

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enough," writes Northrop Frye, "to reverse the procedure almost impossible." The direction of this statement runs directly counter to what our gloomy age expects. Yet it tests true. We can imagine Iliad and Odyssey in only one sequence. To turn back from the long voyage home to the fall of the city, from Odysseus in Penelope's arms to Hector dead and Achilles' death to come, would be to turn experience upside down. It is not mere chronology that forbids it, or arguments from archaeology or technique, but the requirements of the imagination itself, as it balances What Is and What Should Be to make the kind of sense we call art—sense which is enough more than the first to take on shape, and enough less than the second to be felt as real. Historically indeed, but above all emotionally, the Odyssey comes last.

Last—as Sophocles at 90, his proud city collapsing around him, in defeat returned to the bitter legend and brought old Oedipus to the healing grove of Colonus, insisting that though suffering is disproportionate, it is not meaningless but mysteriously confers blessing; last, as Matisse with crippled fingers cut singing color into immense shapes of praise. Not everyone survives, of course. But those who do have a bequest to make. Shakespeare's sequence makes the same statement; what comes last is not the sovereign "Nothing" of *King Lear*, but the benign vision of *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.

Perdita, Miranda; Nausicaa, Telemachus—in comedy the young grow up, the lost are found, the separate joined, as the rhythms of renewal are recognized, and luck, and wonder.

> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world
> That has such people in it!

The comic spirit knows well enough that the goodly creatures Miranda sees are only ourselves, the clowns and criminals and honest men that Prospero has assembled for what Eric Henry, speaking of the characteristic comic ending, calls "that burst of good will in which, at the close, the aberrant society is forgiven and invited to rejoin the mainstream." " 'Tis new to thee," says Prospero to his only daughter, whom he has just betrothed to his enemy's son. Prospero's revels are near ended, and he knows that. Yet here on stage stand Miranda and Ferdinand, undertaking once more to live happily ever after—the young, our own, that simple invest-

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ment in the future we're all capable of, our built-in second chance. For them the tragic past is only a story that grownups remember. Untendentiously, insouciantly, they will go about their business, the business of comedy, making new beginnings of our bad endings, showing us that they were not endings at all, that there are no endings. Even Odysseus has one more journey to make. But though there are no endings, we are not trapped in stasis either, since boy gets girl, the prince and the princess marry and renew the world. Whatever competing structures of enmity and loss we have taught ourselves to call deep, this is one we cannot do without. What Prospero wished for he has accomplished. Ferdinand and Miranda will make their fathers' errors good. Odysseus will come home and when he does, Telemachus will fight at his side and succeed him, making his father glad. The story of Oedipus is not the only story we know. Our Odysseys and *Tempests* stand, permanent challenges to Ivan Karamazov's terrible question, "Who doesn't desire his father's death?", reminding us to read it, not as the late-revealed archetype of all human development, but as Dostoevsky took the trouble to write it, the cry of a mind diseased.

What is at issue today is whether we have grown too conscious and too clever for comedy's burst of good will. In every age but this the creators of our great fictions have regularly accorded us happy endings to stand beside those others that evoke our terror and our pity. Happy endings still exist, of course. But they have lost their ancient legitimacy. Diminished into trash and Tolkien (not, of course, at all the same thing), they awaken an automatic distrust. Though we'll greet any cheap irony with adolescent acceptance, for a contemporary work to end happily seems in itself enough to make us refuse it full intellectual respectability. At least let it be ambiguous—as some critics convert even the ultimate "Yes" of Joyce's great modern Odyssey into fashionable dubiety. Art accommodates itself to our educated expectations; for all the romantic cult of the outsider, writers are as anxious to be thought respectable as readers, nearly as anxious as critics. And so for the first time since the beginning of our literature there is no major artistic mode to affirm the experience of comedy: healing, restoration, winning through.

In the wilderness, a few voices are newly audible. John Fowles makes his Daniel Martin reflect "how all through his writing life, he had avoided the happy ending, as if it were somehow in bad taste. . . . It had become offensive, in an intellectually privileged

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caste, to suggest publicly that anything might turn out well." Is the writer's creative freedom, he asks, "compatible with such deference to a received idea of the age: that only a tragic, absurdist, black-comic view . . . of human destiny could be counted as truly representative and 'serious' "? In *Daniel Martin* the hero is denied disaster, or even the copout of the "open ending," in a refreshing authorial decision that there is no sufficient reason why intelligent and privileged people, even those who have not "fulfilled their promise," even those whose somber fate is to have become highly paid screenwriters, need permeate our fictions with narcissistic bellyaching. Saul Bellow attacks the same orthodoxies in his Nobel Prize address (the general neglect of which eloquently illustrates its thesis):

> Essay after essay, book after book . . . maintain . . . the usual things about mass society, dehumanization, and the rest. How weary we are of them. How poorly they represent us. The pictures they offer no more resemble us than we resemble the reconstructed reptiles and other monsters in a museum of paleontology. We are much more limber, versatile, better articulated; there is much more to us; we all feel it.

Our claims to *angst* override realism, common sense; they override our own experience.

Consider the ending of Heller's *Something Happened.* The unpleasant, trapped, pathetic musings of its unpleasant, trapped, pathetic narrator cannily suppress until the last few pages what is offered as the climactic fact: what's happened is that this suburban father has somehow managed to kill the little boy who is the one creature he loves in the world. Our interest in whether it was a true accident or consciously or unconsciously willed shrivels before the event's blank incredibility, even in its own fictional circumstances. The ending is absurd indeed, but in no cosmic sense; it is merely implausible. We have come full circle. In a hundred years, the unhappy ending has become as gratuitous as the conventional happy conclusion the nineteenth century novelists came to find so confining.

"Fairy-tale endings" we have come to call them—the phrase itself is a repudiation. In *The Uses of Enchantment* Bruno Bettelheim has made another old man's bequest; he has tried to give us back fairy-tales. He has dressed his insights in the Oedipal garments of twentieth-century respectability, but they shine brighter naked.

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"The fairy tale leaves no doubt in the child's mind that the pain must be endured and the risky chances taken"; it can do this because "despite all anxieties, there is no question about the happy ending." "The message that fairy tales get across to the child in manifold form [is] that struggle . . . is an intrinsic part of human experience—but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all the obstacles and at the end emerges victorious." Yet children are not the only ones among us who have deep uses for archetypes of success. Bettelheim quotes Schiller: "Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life"; he reminds us that "only if a fairy tale met the conscious and unconscious requirements of many people was it repeatedly retold." It was not children who invented these stories. The message of fairy tale is the message of the Odyssey—the indispensable message of comedy.

Yet even Schiller's tribute reinforces the conventional opposition between the meanings of fairy tales and "the truth that is taught by life." To speak of a fairy-tale ending is another way of saying "untrue," an assertion that the story ends, not according to our experience but our wishes. Dying gods may rise again and winter give place to spring—a secular society knows, if only from anthropology, that people might think that. But even those who recognize the ancient emotional uses of such mythic happy endings will concede, all too readily, that the mythic is also mythical in the common sense: false. The most they dare claim is that the truth of comedy is somehow deeper than the real world's. The hardnosed simply reiterate "untrue."

Yet mythic need not mean mythical. Stories can be archetypal, and still show us how people and events can interrelate for good in a world we recognize, how character attracts luck and makes the prosperous outcome not only wished-for but likely. It is important to distinguish a kind of happy ending different from those of fairy-tale or myth, where miraculous escapes and supernatural assistants invite the hard-nosed to dismiss them (or ghetto them into innocent, old-fashioned art-forms like the Tolkien romances). From Homer on, there have always been fiction-makers who have interested themselves in what may be called *earned* happy endings. Putting their resources of language and invention to dramatising the qualities of personality that conduce to happy outcomes, they have

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been fascinated by the human capacity for adaptation, moderation, for perseverance without obsessiveness; by the quality that bends but does not break.

Comedy can contain pain. The name "Odysseus" comes from the same "pain" root which gives us "anodyne," and every Greek knew that to be Odysseus meant to have more than one man's share of trouble. In the Odyssey, we are made to wait through five books to meet the hero; when we do, he is sitting on the shore, his eyes "never dry, weeping for a way home," weary of adventures and Calypso. Almost all those familiar adventures—Cyclops, Sirens, Circe, Hades and the rest—took place in the first eighteen months of his ten-year's voyage. They are crammed into a small fraction of the Odyssey's twenty-four books; more than half the action takes place in Ithaca. The Odyssey is a poem of wandering, but primarily of homecoming, its prosperous outcome seconded by luck, but earned by intelligence. It is mythic and realistic at once. It offers all the accoutrements of fairy tale—giants and witches, magic beasts and herbs, supernatural helpers. Yet it displays in its array of survivor characters—not Odysseus only but wise Penelope and prudent Telemachus, sleek old Nestor, Menelaus and the lady Helen—the personal resilience that is a necessary aspect of the power to endure.

That resilience may include a certain deviousness; more kindly we might call it tact. We need continually to be reminded that too strong an integrity, however it may command admiration, can work devastation, like Cordelia's and Lear's. Odysseus himself, joined later by the versatile slave of New Comedy (recently resurrected in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*), shows the alternative type. Like the slave, Odysseus in the Cyclops' cave is not in a position to fail grandly. The tragic poets were fascinated by the Antigones and Creons, who will die—or kill—rather than disguise what they are or compromise what they are sure they know. The comic vision contemplates and celebrates the reverse. These are the characters who have all the luck, who are happy-accident-prone. Comedy shows us how they make their luck. If Shakespeare, in his late comedies, affirms the mythic vision of restoration, his earlier comedies, as Hugh Richmond has shown,[1] interest themselves in the flexibility, adaptability, the willingness to climb down from preestablished positions that is necessary to earn

[1] *Shakespeare's Sexual Comedy: A Mirror for Lovers* (Indianapolis: Bobbs, Merrill, 1971).

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happy endings. It is the quality that Richard Wilbur has noted in Molière's comedies, of those who respond to life and do not coerce it.

These are the happy endings in which we can believe. We think of Trollope, who applied himself seriously and successfully to the task of investigating what behavior in human beings tended to bring about the kind of endings his public demanded and he himself would wish for his characters. His modest gifts did not include myth-making. But he accepted, as Dickens never did, the responsibility for imagining the prerequisites for happy endings which should be organic and not imposed.

It is a grand claim we make when we reject happy endings: that we are very special, that whatever songs previous ages could sing, in our terrible century all success is shallow or illusory, all prosperity a fairy tale; that the only responses to our world which can command adult assent are compulsive ironies and cries of pain; that the world which seems to lie before us like a world of dreams, so various, so beautiful, so new, hath, in short, really neither joy nor love nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain, and we are here as on a darkling plain waiting for Godot. But what is true enough when recognized as half the story rings counterfeit when it aggrandizes the whole. Since misery loves company, it will find it. But second-hand misery is as inauthentic as second-hand cheerfulness, and far less attractive. It used to be possible to laugh at melancholy Jacques.

In the world of unparalleled safety and comfort which most contemporary readers and writers inhabit, it takes real chutzpah to deny that there can be true tales of victory, unscrambling, fortunate coming together, that literature can weightily concern itself with imagining a world in which luck is frequently on our side, and dramatizing the social wisdom which knows how prosperous outcomes are commonly brought about. Was Homer's vision—Chaucer's—Shakespeare's—Molière's—so much less searching than our own? There is an ugly arrogance in the insistence that our age, alone among all, is too terrible for comedy. In the city of York, in the years when Shakespeare was writing, only ten percent of the population lived to the age of forty. Aristocrats indeed did better; they had nearly an even chance. We cannot imagine what the words "the shadow of death" meant to our forefathers. The Thirty

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Years War left two of every three in Germany dead. Chaucer's pilgrims rode to Canterbury through a countryside which a generation before had been devastated by the Black Death. In 1348 Oxford lost two-thirds of her academic population. It was not out of his prosperity that Dante wrote of the good he found. Any realistic consideration of the life of the past, both in its day-to-day precariousness and its vulnerability to repeated holocaust, will show up our claims to unique misery as uniquely self-centered.

> It is incorrect [wrote Auden] to say . . . that all men have a right to the pursuit of happiness. . . . Happiness is not a right; it is a duty. To the degree that we are unhappy we are in sin (and vice versa).

The idea is old enough to be ready for rediscovery. In Kierkegaard's formulation, Despair is Sin, related like all other sins to Pride, first of the deadly company. Happiness is our business. Hope is not the lucky gift of circumstance or even disposition, but a virtue like faith and love, to be practiced whether or not we find it easy, or even natural, because it is necessary to our survival as human beings.

Christian thinkers of course go farther. Survival suggests safety, and the other way to say that is salvation. "My duty to God," continues Auden, "is to be happy." It is what Dostoevsky's Father Zossima says to silly Mme Holakhov, when on the day before his death she tells him how well and happy he's looking. He understands his illness, and does not deceive himself or her. "But if I seem happy to you, you could never say anything that would please me more. For men were made for happiness and anyone who is completely happy has a right to say to himself, 'I am doing God's will on earth.' All the righteous, all the saints, all the holy martyrs were happy."

Poignant enough, since Dostoevsky himself so evidently was not. But to cite the Christian version of the comic imperative is unnecessarily to limit the application of what Homer knew as well as Chaucer and Dante and Shakespeare. Plato and Aristotle knew it too: Aristotle saw happiness as virtue's serene by-product, and Father Zossima's cheerfulness before death pays its debt to the Socrates of the *Phaedo*. The art that affirms survival reaches through rite to reality; that babies are born, that pain passes, that spring comes again, is as sure as that the sun will rise tomorrow. It is, says Frye,

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speaking of Shakespearean comedy, an archetypal function of literature to visualize "the world of desire, not as an escape from 'reality,' but as the genuine form of the world that human life tries to imitate."

Nor need one be religious to speak up for happy endings. Georg Lukàcs, that gallant and sensitive Marxist, demonstrates how our time's great secular locus of Faith imposes the same demands. For Marxism, like Christianity and Judaism, establishes for history a direction which gives life meaning beyond mere process. Speaking of the fruitfulness of "justified historical optimism," Lukàcs carefully distinguishes it from that "schematic optimism" which gives rise to unearned happy endings. He writes impatiently of the gift for misery of the modern existential hero, "basically solitary . . . , constitutionally unable to establish relationships with things or persons outside himself," trapped in a world in which it is considered "impossible to determine theoretically the origin and goal of human existence." In *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* Lukàcs, discussing the literature of *angst*, refuses to accept it as a justified response to a decadent and oppressive capitalism. Rather it is "a rejection of reality," "an escape into nothingness." He castigates the glorification of the pathological which is now everywhere around us, as "distortion becomes the normal condition of human existence . . . the formative principle of art and literature." He sees in Kafka and Beckett, for all their marvelous inventiveness, an apotheosis of impotence and paralysis, which makes "the denial of history, of development the mark of true insight into the nature of reality." And when "the static nature of reality and the senselessness of its surface phenomena" are accepted as "absolute truths requiring no proof," "*angst* becomes supreme."

For the artist, whether bourgeois or socialist, has an obligation to the whole truth. "The question," for Lukàcs, "is not: is *x* present in reality? But rather: does *x* represent the whole of reality?"

> What counts is the personal decision. . . . : acceptance or rejection of *angst*. Ought *angst* to be taken as an absolute or ought it to be overcome? Should it be considered one reaction among others, or should it become the determinant of the *condition humaine*? These are not primarily, of course, literary questions—they relate to a man's behavior and experience of life. The crucial question is whether a man escapes from the life of his time into a realm of abstraction—it is there that *angst* is

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> engendered in human consciousness—or confronts modern life determined to fight its evils and support what is good in it.

Bellow is more Platonic, but he comes out in the same place:

> The value of literature lies in these "true impressions." A novel moves back and forth between the world of objects, of actions, of appearances, and that other world from which these "true impressions" come and which moves us to believe that the good we hang on to so tenaciously—in the face of evil, so obstinately—is no illusion.

Tragedy and Comedy: the masks are two. Iliad and Odyssey require each other—or rather, it is we who require them both. It is imperative to hail winners as well as heroic losers; to refuse credence or admiration to those who manage to get what they want and want what they get announces a perverse and envious romanticism. It is that sulky refusal of good that Dante knew, according it no grand extremes of fire or ice, but the unlovely muck of Styx. "Tristi fummo"—"Sullen were we in the sweet air the sun made glad, bearing within us a sluggish smoke."

Since there are no endings, tragedy can be no more *final* than comedy. In every fiction, the pause we call an ending has been imposed by a mind, and reflects a choice. Our solemn rejection of happy endings would be lethal, personally and socially, if it were not by nature partial and temporary. Yet it may most sanely, perhaps, be seen as comic, comic in the familiar sense: ludicrous. We may recall the cry of the Frenchman at the beach resort, in that story grammarians used to tell to illustrate the difference between "shall" and "will," in the days when people still cared about such things: "I will be drowned, and nobody shall save me!"

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GIORGIO CHIESURA

From *The Immobile Zone*

The Action (table of contents)

About how the immobility
came unexpectedly and suddenly
as soon as we arrived at camp—
when we went in,
the large and variable shapes
of the plain fixed themselves
and there was no more change.

Then, this slow blind interior
movement of each closed in himself
to find his new form of life.

And all around the men
a little at a time ceased
to change constantly and to flow
before one's eyes like so many
Chinese shadows, and re-surfaced
in gray shapeless conspiring huddles
to question one another haphazardly.

The Immobile Zone

How I escape the rapid emptiness
of these days
to an interior mobility that makes them slower.
How I begin to flow
and fluctuate among memories
among feelings and nostalgia remembrances

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and intentions, for which this imprisonment
is, more and more, only a pretext.

But nostalgia is nothing if not a feeling created
by ourselves about ourselves thanks to the long time
elapsed or the illusion of a place created by absence.
And such, surely, are always even our intentions.

Between the illusions of the past and those of the future
the only thing real for us is this immobile stretch of life
isolated from the past and from the future,
should we have one, by two sharp edges.

And while around us all the world crumbles
you could say that this immobile zone
is one of the marvels of this age.

The Trees

At the beginning of the imprisonment
all those trees were thick
with red-green leaves and birds.
Then they turned yellow, almost
overnight, and while they stripped themselves,
behind them, almost as if to make up for it
emerged the big-bellied cupola of Neriptka.

They are beautiful, poplars and beeches with
white or pearly trunks and all naked now
or almost, they rise against the sky
with the lightness
and brilliance of distant rivers.
But with a different sign: thickly bundled,
white-scratched against the gray of sky
or white-etched against the black
of the far-away wood up to the very last
branch and up to the thinnest dry tip: a head

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of hair, a stiffened tangle from which,
from here, you could almost pick
and break a hair.

Time (Forecast)

Now time will slow down.
It used to flow and linger in snatches,
now it has but one measure.
Actually, it will have no measure, and if at first
its behavior, so irregular, was caused by our
various ways of reacting emotionally
toward outside things
now that outside are no more things,
nor any emotions worthy of the name,
it will happen that our interior strengths
will gradually enter the field alone:
in this field of time
tilting alone
perhaps against windmills.

The Rock

Bevilacqua is dead, and, yesterday,
they told me to go to Fersen, if I
wanted to see him before his interment.
I went alone, on foot, across the moor.
I explained why I had come, and they took
me to an empty room where I saw
a crumpled blanket on the floor
that seemed to be thrown over a rock.
They left. Then I could see that
the rock was his head
and the folds of the blanket
the traces of what was left of his limbs.

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The Man With the Handkerchief

He sat on the ledge of the barrack
while near him the sun slowly destroyed
in a myriad of minuscule landslides
the embroideries and ripples that the water
sprayed during the laundering
had sketched on the sand a short time ago.
When between him and us the noise of steps
died, between us remained only
the white cloth of his handkerchief.
He held it by two corners between thumb
and forefinger, and, elbows resting on his knees,
stretched it before him, intent.
The piece of cloth hung limp,
and when the frothing of air, the breath
of a tired old man, trailed in from the plain
it received it docile as an ear
hinting at its undulations of algae.
The man with the handkerchief had
a thick black mustache, a cordial face.
He broke the pose, looked up with good
will toward us; even smiled; went so
far as to speak a few words.
"Is it dry?"
He smiled at us, "Not yet."
"Will it take long?"
He shrugged. "Time passes."
Gianpiero and I said goodbye and left,
chattering our way around the barrack.
He watched us leave in silence, rapt,
then quietly hung his handkerchief
out again.

[Translated from the Italian by Rina Ferrarelli]

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JANE M. MAHER

Uncle Vinnie

MY UNCLE VINNIE LIVED WITH US between jail terms. My mother forbade him to talk about prison in front of us children, so he would always say that he had been in Africa. Then he would wink at my father and say that there were so many blacks in the clink that he might as well have been in Africa. This was way before the word black became acceptable, so my mother, overhearing Vinnie from the kitchen, would yell that you had to call them coloreds in front of the children. Then my father would stare knowingly at Vinnie and say that kids had to be taught what the world was really like; the religious stuff the nuns were feeding us in school was useless in a dark alley. It's okay if they want these kids at Mass and communion every morning, but guys like my father and Vinnie who knew the score had to keep the streets safe so as we could get there in the same condition as we left the house. You damn well couldn't rely on those lying cheating Irish politicians to do anything, they would kiss a nigger's ass if it could get them half a vote. This was really too much for my mother. She would storm around screaming that she really couldn't wait to see how three kids who heard this stuff all day long would turn out. There's no excuse for it because it wasn't as if they were all ignorant immigrants, they had been born right here, and if the nuns in school knew what these kids were exposed to they would probably have us all excommunicated.

I didn't pay too much attention to what my mother said. I was too fascinated with the image of an Irish politician getting his half vote. In my fifth grade history book, there was a picture of a group of runaway slaves holding babies and bundles and looking miserable, which was supposed to be the underground railroad. Soon after I confused them and thought they all lived in Uncle Tom's Cabin. Anyway, whenever Uncle Vinnie and my father talked about where Irish politicians would bestow a kiss, I would think of that picture and understand why the runaway slaves looked so sad. Once, when I heard two boys on my block fighting and one told the other to tell your mother to kiss my ass, I was pretty surprised to hear that a woman in our neighborhood was a politician.

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Uncle Vinnie didn't know that I knew that the word clink meant jail, but it seemed very clear to me that jail was called the clink because that must have been the sound the big iron door made when it shut. I tried never to let my roller skates bump together when I carried them, so that Uncle Vinnie wouldn't have to hear that sound more often than necessary. For a long time I worried about letting my roller skates bunk together, until my English teacher told me that bunking together meant sharing a bunk bed; the proper word was bump. Everyone in my family, especially my father, continued to say bunk, so I just assumed that I was the smartest person in the house. But not the bravest. You didn't correct my father's grammar without taking your life in your hands, or at the very least setting yourself up for a half-hour lecture about how just because some people are too busy supporting their families and not taking nothing for nothing so they couldn't learn a lot of useless grammar to impress other good for nothings, doesn't mean that they aren't just as good as anyone else no matter who they are. All the while I would be saying to myself that a lot means a parcel of land and two negatives make a positive; I was a really good English student. But I kept all these little gems of wisdom to myself, because you don't correct the grammar of a six foot three inch two hundred and fifty pound first generation to be born in America Italian father, and expect to be rewarded with money for an Italian ice.

Uncle Vinnie knew how smart I was, and I liked that. Whenever I did my multiplication problems, he would sit next to me and we would do the problems together and see who could finish first. He could never get over how fast I was, and he would always yell to my mother that he didn't know where this kid got her brains from, but she sure had plenty of them, she could multiply with the best of them. Then Vinnie and I would look at each other and start to giggle because we knew that my mother would say that I got my brains from her father, who had been able to do problems in his head that most people couldn't do on paper. Then she would tell us that when they built the Brooklyn Bridge, her father was down there at the piers every morning, and sometimes the engineers talked to him and asked him for advice. Obviously, Vinnie never inherited any of these mathematical genes, even though he was my mother's brother, because even though he used to pretend that he got some of the problems wrong on purpose just to see if I was

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sharp enough to catch him, he was really bad on the nine and twelve times tables. Whenever we had a multiplication test in school and the question was twelve times seven, I would say to myself: the real answer is eighty-four but Vinnie always thinks it's eighty-two and gets the problem wrong. Then I would think how smart I was to remember the right answer and a wrong one too, and not confuse them, while all the other kids were counting on their fingers.

Vinnie never got married; I always wished he would because I wanted to be a flower girl with a long dress so that all my girlfriends could come to see me at church. Then the next day I would have to miss school because I got home from the reception so late that I didn't have time to wash the rice out of my hair. Vinnie did date a girl named Margie for years, who was pretty although she was a little fat, but she had two girlfriends, also unmarried, who had convinced her that my uncle wasn't the brightest prospect around. Obviously, there weren't too many other potential husbands roaming the streets of Brooklyn, because whenever Vinnie was released, Margie always came to dinner a few nights later, looking pretty happy to see him. My mother always made lasagna, because she knew Vinnie loved it, and Margie would say that she would only have a very little because she was watching her weight, and my sister and I would kick each other under the table for all we were worth because she would eat more than my father and Vinnie put together. But she was really very nice and you couldn't blame her because my mother's lasagna was really delicious. My father would always say that you didn't have to sprinkle a half a pound of grated cheese on the top of my mother's lasagna the way you had to over my Aunt Marie's to kill the greasy taste of her tomato sauce. Then my mother would say that one of these days one of the kids was going to slip and say something about it to Marie, which would be very embarrassing. But my father would say that Marie would be doing her family a big favor if she gave up and started buying sauce in a jar. After dinner my mother would go into the kitchen to get dessert, and I would sit at the dining room table watching Vinnie try to kiss Margie. He would put his arm around her back and make the tips of his fingers just touch the side of her breast. She would shift uncomfortably and stare at me in horror as if I had to share at least some of the blame for the existence of this sex maniac. Later on, my older sister told me that the

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nuns told her that girls like Margie were very good for not letting men touch them there, but it was all pretty much lost on me. I didn't have any breasts yet and I wasn't in any particular hurry to get them. Vinnie didn't seem to care in the very least that Margie was sitting there looking as if she wanted to stab him. He just put his hands on the table and started pushing the Italian bread crumbs into neat little piles, and asked Margie if she would rather be spending the evening with Adele and Anna who were probably making a novena to the Blessed Mother at that very moment praying for you know what. I didn't know what, but I was pretty big on novenas myself. I was praying for a vocation to become a mother superior, a plain old nun wouldn't do for someone with my intelligence, so I asked Margie what Adele and Anna were making their novenas for. Margie looked right at Vinnie and said that they were her best friends and they weren't in church they were probably in a theater because they were extremely refined and cultivated and read the reviews and discussed them on the subway in the morning on the way to work. They weren't interested in only one thing like some ignorant people in this world.

I understood why Adele and Anna only discussed the reviews in the morning, because one night my father had come home from work and told my mother that he had seen Adele on the express train sound asleep with her mouth and legs wide open with her head bobbing looking as if she had done more than typing all day long. My mother looked disgusted and wondered if that was the kind of evening it was going to be. She hoped that he had woken Adele up so that she didn't miss her stop, but my father said that a guy could give the wrong impression trying to wake someone up who slept as tight as Adele did, and anyway she got off at the stop after his.

My mother really liked Margie and she also felt sorry for her. Secretly she thought she was a fool for dating Vinnie, and the day after the dinner she shook her head and smiled and said that the way Margie used the word cultivated instead of cultured you would think her best friends were rosebushes or something. When Margie talked about the theater my mother asked her which plays she had seen recently, and the next time she came would she please bring a Playbill for the children to see. My father would make a face and start to make noise with his knife and fork just to annoy my mother, because he knew it was her way of reminding him that he

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never took her to the theater anymore the way he did before they were married.

Instead, every Friday night he would take her to the racetrack. My mother really liked the races, but she would never admit it to my father. My Uncle Vinnie knew some of the jockeys, and my mother was always asking him to ask them what they ate to stay so thin. Vinnie would tell her that they could never go near her lasagna or they'd be finished. My mother and father had six stop watches between them; I think Vinnie had something to do with getting them dirt cheap. They would time all the horses while they worked out, but just before my father was ready to place a bet on a fast horse, Vinnie would appear with a really hot tip. My father would never take Vinnie's advice; he insisted that he had horse racing down to a science, and he probably did because he never lost too much at one time. He would get angry as anything at my mother who would sneak off to the two-dollar window and bet on number five in the seventh because my little sister had just turned five on the seventh of July. More often than not she would win, and once we had a week's vacation in Pennsylvania on the winnings from a longshot called Sucker, played by my mother because I still sucked my thumb at ten years of age.

My mother thought that a pretty good way of getting me to break this habit was to tell anyone who would listen that I sucked my thumb just like a little baby. Actually, she was doing me a favor; it was less embarrassing being seen sucking your thumb by someone who already knew you did it. Whenever my Uncle Vinnie caught me sucking my thumb, which wasn't all that often because I was pretty fast at pretending that I was pulling on my upper lip, he would do a pretty good waltz step around the room and croon in a really good, deep voice a rendition of Take Your Finger Out of Youth Mouth, I Want A Little Kiss From You. I would laugh like anything because he was so silly, but once he just shook his head and said that in jail you couldn't sing because everybody, even the guards, changed the words to make the songs as filthy as anything. Then after a while you forgot the real words and caught yourself muttering the dirty words before you even realized it. My friends in school had done a little improvising of their own around Christmas time with Deck the Halls With Boughs of Holly, so I knew exactly what he meant. I liked when Uncle Vinnie talked to me about jail; I was the only one who never repeated a word he said to

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anyone. He would always tell my mother to leave me alone, all the geniuses in the clink sucked their thumbs while they read all the law books they could get their hands on to prepare their own defense. My mother would get really mad at Vinnie, not because he compared me with prisoners, she was pretty sure that the Blessed Mother was going to come through with that vocation, but because he had mentioned the clink and because he was encouraging my habit. She said that all you have to do is tell this kid, who already thinks she's smarter than Einstein, that other geniuses suck their thumbs and they'll wind up burying her at ninety years of age with her thumb in her mouth.

About twice a month my Uncle Vinnie would tell the joke about the riot in the convent because the toilet seat had been found up, and we always laughed because we knew my mother didn't think that joke was too bad and she wouldn't yell at Vinnie for telling it. We all felt a little sorry for Vinnie, he never seemed to be able to do things right. He would always say that he was only a guest in our house, he had no real place of his own, but if he ever got one we could come over all the time, and have plenty of ice cream whenever we wanted it, and we'd each have our own room with our own television set in it so that we could watch Howdy Doody and Rin Tin Tin and Fury or whatever we wanted to watch. Vinnie slept in the basement in the summer and in the room in the attic in the winter, depending on when he was around, and my mother always forbade us to disturb him, because he had little enough privacy for the last eight months or year or however long he had been wherever she thought we thought he had been.

My mother thought it was a nice idea that I wanted to become a nun, and every once in a while she said that she and my father would start coming to church with me on Sunday, but that it was very hard for my father to sit with all those hypocrites. It didn't bother me that they didn't come as much as she thought it did. I dreaded the idea of my father meeting Sister Mary Catherine. I could just see him telling her that I was probably the smartest kid in that school and they were damn lucky to have me even if he didn't contribute to the expansion fund. Then I could just see him telling her what a stupid idea the expansion fund was, because if a family could afford twenty dollars a month per child, they wouldn't be living in this parish in the first place. My father was not very big on nuns, even less so on priests. If I failed a test or was kept after school, my father would say that those nuns needed

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something better to do than punish kids for being normal. My mother would give him one of her I-don't-know-how-much-longer-I-can-take-this faces, and say that the nuns were brave women who had chosen a life harder than most. But that didn't stop her and her friends from saying no wonder most of those nuns were obese, imagine forty unmarried women living together and having to wear those twenty pound habits with those rosary beads on their belts getting caught on everything. She would eat too much too, especially because under all those clothes you couldn't tell where the body ended and the clothes began. My mother's best friend told her that her girlfriend's son worked as a delivery boy for the florist across the street from the convent, and once when he delivered Easter flowers he heard two nuns screaming at each other. My mother's friend was pretty sure one of them was Sister Cecelia Mary because she was a real witch who had no right to teach kindergarten children, because when they wet their pants she left them that way until the end of the day. Fortunately, her son had wet his pants at two-thirty.

My Uncle Vinnie was the only one who didn't make fun of me when I walked around the house with about ten white towels pinned all over my body with one of my father's socks covering my hair. I pretended that I was the mother superior of a school for very good, quiet children. Vinnie didn't say too much about my vocation. He seemed to think that the convent was a little like jail; it was much easier to get in than it was to get out, but if the food wasn't bad you couldn't complain too much. Actually, I had decided on the convent because of my thumb sucking. I couldn't get married because every night I'd have to wait for my husband to fall asleep first so that then I could suck my thumb without him seeing it. But even if I could manage that, there was always the possibility that he would wake up early in the morning and see me. In the convent, I would have my own room, provided the parish expansion program went ahead without my father's pledge.

When my sister graduated from the elementary school, my father made a donation of five hundred dollars. They published a really impressive thank you notice in the Sunday Bulletin which I showed to all my friends, but when my father saw it he said that he had a good mind to stop payment on the check, why should everyone in the parish know his business, did they think he did it just to impress everybody or something. This really upset my mother because it was their first checking account, and every month when

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the statement came in the mail she would show everyone how her balance and the bank's balance was identical, and if it wasn't identical then the bank always said that she had more than she thought she had, which made her just as happy. The prospect of the confusion of a stop payment overwhelmed her. My mother was always so proud when my father had some important figures to add or subtract, he would always ask her to help because then he would be sure they were right. If she was in the middle of doing the dishes or something, he would say that anyone could do that work, would she please come over and help where she was really needed. It once occurred to me to tell him that he should do the dishes while she did the math, but as I said I was the smartest kid in the family. Anyway, my father was still a little annoyed that I had stretched the tops of all his black socks.

Vinnie would have let me wear his socks, but he only had gray ones. He was very good to all of us and let us do anything we wanted, but my little sister was definitely his favorite. I didn't mind that at all as long as he knew I was the smartest. She would wait for him to come into the kitchen in the morning and throw her arms around him and give him as many kisses as he would ask for. He would always ask for more than seven, because she would always leave the number seven out when counting the kisses on her fingers and get pretty confused and make us laugh. Then Uncle Vinnie would explain it to her very gently and look at my mother and say that here was another one without even one of my grandfather's mathematical genes. He would always want to take her for walks over the Brooklyn Bridge, but my mother would never let him. She would say that he would hold my sister's hand, but just who was going to hold his hand. My mother would never let Vinnie babysit for us, she said that he just never learned responsibility and he wasn't going to start taking lessons on her kids. She was right, because once he took us out for ice cream and met some of his friends and didn't get us home until after midnight. My mother's screaming and yelling was not too effective, because Vinnie kept asking her what was the matter, could he help it if her kids were very slow eaters.

Aside from that, my parents really didn't mind having Vinnie around all day long, and he was pretty handy around the house. Once he made us a great go-cart, but then my sister cried for days when she discovered that he had taken the wheels off her roller skates to make it. Once, he retarred the entire roof of our house,

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but my mother was not too happy when her neighbor told her that she could see from her attic window that Vinnie had stuck all his empty beer bottles in the tar and left them there, and she hoped that the kids didn't inherit his sense of humor. Vinnie said that the cheap bitch was just mad because she couldn't stand to think of all those nickel deposits just sitting there collecting rain water. There must have been thirty of them; it was a hot job. Actually, my father got pretty mad and told Vinnie to go up and get them. Then my father accused Vinnie of drinking more beer than an Irishman, so Vinnie got really mad and stormed out of the house to go and borrow back the ladder from the man around the corner. Vinnie said that he wished my father would go back and get his sense of humor from wherever he had left it. We all laughed and asked my father where he had left his sense of humor, and he laughed too and followed Vinnie to help him with the ladder. As my mother said, that tarring job was brutal work, and it would have cost more than four hundred dollars to have it done. This was before my older sister had graduated, so I kind of hoped that my father would use the four hundred dollars to contribute to the parish expansion fund; I was the only one in my class whose family had not contributed. But being the smartest kid in the family, I kept my mouth shut.

Uncle Vinnie never got those bottles off the roof, and for all I know they are still there. He disappeared a few days later, and this time the FBI was involved. My mother was afraid for Vinnie, and humiliated because the agents were hanging around and asking the neighbors questions. Margie called a few times and asked my mother if she had heard anything. I heard my mother say that this time she was afraid that Vinnie was involved in something he couldn't handle, then she began to cry and said that for the first time in her life she was glad that her parents had died when she was young so that they wouldn't have to live through this.

My sisters and I didn't think too much of it all; we missed Vinnie but we had seen him come and go before. After a few weeks had passed, Margie stopped calling, and once when I saw her on the street we pretended that we didn't know each other. I never asked my mother what Vinnie was wanted for, even when I was much older and knew that she would have told me. It was just one of those times when you're pretty sure your suspicions aren't half as bad as the reality, and that's the way you want to keep it.

Two years ago, when my mother was dying, she surprised me by

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mentioning Uncle Vinnie for the first time in years. We had all presumed a long time ago that he wasn't coming back, and gradually the basement and the room in the attic filled up with old toys and furniture. My mother told me that she had always looked in the newspapers to see if any unidentified bodies had been found, and that she was relieved that she wouldn't have to do it anymore. The day we buried my mother, I kept thinking about Uncle Vinnie. My mother had no other living relatives, everybody else was from my father's side, and it made me think that perhaps my mother somehow felt lonely. At the cemetery, I kept thinking that by some incredible chance he would come. I kept thinking that somehow, after twenty years, he would see the obituary and just appear.

Memories of when I was young were coming back, and I was overcome with pity and love for those people who had loved me and had done the best they could, even if sometimes it wasn't all that good, and even if they wasted too much energy defending themselves from those people who had done better. I wanted Vinnie to see me grown up; I wanted him to see my children, not for my sake, but for his. That night, I talked about Vinnie to my father, and it seemed to make him feel better. My father told me that Vinnie had once said that if he had been born with half the brains I had, he would have been okay. When I asked my father if he agreed, he said that having the brains wasn't as important as using them. My father wouldn't come home with me that night, he said that the smell of his Italian cigars would drive my husband crazy. I didn't suggest that he not smoke them for one night, I might have been older, but I was still a pretty smart kid. My younger sister's husband smokes the same brand of cigars, so my father spent the night at her house, but he went right back home early the next morning.

Lately, I have been noticing articles in the newspapers about unidentified bodies and missing persons, nothing serious, I just glance at them. They've become harder to ignore. I told my oldest daughter all about my Uncle Vinnie, and I asked her if she thinks I nag her, how would she like an uncle who gave you a rendition of Take Your Finger Out of Your Mouth, I Want A Little Kiss From You every time he caught you sucking your thumb. She said she would like that a lot—and I didn't tell her that a lot is a parcel of land.

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ALBERT HALEY

Somewhere Is the Jungle

DAYS BEFORE THE RECENT FIGHTING swept the northern provinces, the man known as Mr. Mertin said he would take his first bath. He would take it in the white bathtub. The children thumped their bellies. They waited to see what they had never seen.

The bathtub came from England. An Englishman floating the river had brought it a hundred years before. Along the river banks he traded firearms for ivory if the ivory was worth it. After he died no other Englishmen came to take away the bathtub or remember what it was. The bathtub had four curved legs. The legs ended in curled lion's claws. The villagers told Mertin that the broken lion belonged to an English that their oldest old man no longer saw in his head. It was the first thing they showed Mr. Mertin. Mertin told them it was a white bathtub. During the months it continued to fill with rain. The water was always used for cooking and there was plenty. In the evening the same cow came from the river and drank whatever it liked. The kids often wanted to squat over the bathtub and pee. The black women chased them with rocks and dipped fresh bowls of water.

By noon the white bathtub was hotter than the air because the sun hit it in the open, hard. Mr. Mertin told the women to carry the broken lion belonging to the forgotten English to the middle of the village, a square of orange dirt and grass blades. The orange grass was dry as wood. The women understood and lifted. Mr. Mertin spoke all languages. He was not a French, but he spoke French. He was not a speck, but he told them he spoke the speck and the rus-kee, too. Now he could talk to all people anywhere in the north, he said. They believed this because he was a young man with a loud voice. Too Mr. Mertin had a machine that made his voice louder than the animals. He called the village men with the voice whenever he wanted.

The women boiled water in gasoline tins over their fire. They picked up the tins, carried them, filled the bathtub, all without the tin making blisters on the hands. Mertin told them to get lost. The water was from the river and dark brown, dark red. Mertin tested

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the water by plunging his arm to the elbow. He took off his uniform. The water was ready when Mertin stuck his arm in, bit his lip, and held the arm underwater. Mertin gripped the sides of the tub. He lowered himself like he was taking a seat in a swing.

The children saw half a white body sticking out of the white. Talking much to each other they came dragging sticks. The dogs stumbled behind. The dogs came up and smelled at the four legs. Then they went to lie on their sides in the shade of the jungle trees.

The children crossed their hands on their black bellies or they uncrossed their hands and held on to the edge. One said, "Why bring the river here when the river is over there, baby." He pointed toward the jungle leaves. The boys and girls made laughs out of what this boy said. Mr. Mertin sat up in the water looking only ahead. Half of him was out of the water.

Two small ones crawled beneath. They lay on their backs in the dirt and shouted because what they touched was hot. They tapped on the hot bottom with stones. The two said, "Where is the other half of you, baby." The children made many laughs.

The bare heads made a huddle of at least ten around Mertin. That made eleven. The kids were looking over the edge, some having to stand on tiptoes, trying to see what was Mertin under the red water. The kids laughed sillily. Mertin jerked his head around and checked the ground. The kids had their feet on his clothes, but they did not bend down and fool with the pockets yet. They wanted only to look at him like it was a day at the zoo. Mertin smiled because it made him think how all the Americans years ago had been calling it the zoo, the zoo until he forgot. Anything on legs that runs, or makes noise, that smells or smells you, or things that fly or are flies, all are a part of the zoo, that was how they said it.

Mertin splashed water on one breast and under the arm. He listened for the sound in the sky. Flies were landing on his neck and crawling slowly. When he slapped the flies buzzed off. The kids threw their mitts in the air trying to palm the big blue flies. They had a freak-out waving their arms and jumping in place. The flies made them laugh like idiot bastard children and birds, too.

"Go away. I will be deadly with you. Va-moose," Mertin said then, "Get the hell out of here," in his language, for himself to hear.

The children saw Mr. Mertin chase the flies with his hands, then he hit children's cheeks. All but two picked up their sticks and ran

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away. The girl and boy at the foot of the bathtub looked in the water. Mr. Mertin made his legs make the water splash on their faces. They let go of the bathtub and ran to the others shouting. The water was hotter than the sun.

Mertin felt a tapping under his toes. "I will be deadly with you," he said. The taps stopped as another sound began. Mertin heard the sound in the sky which was coming closer. The kids stood by the trees with the dogs while the airplane flew. Boys and girls were all bellies, navels, and bald heads. Heads like bellies were shaped like eggs. The high kid's jabbering was louder than the first airplane. In the sky he saw three sun circles and shaded his eyes for a while. It was so high that Mertin could not pick it out.

Mertin made a cup with his hands and poured water on his face, throat and over his tits. Now he heard the second airplane. It was so much lower he saw it.

A propellor plane, too, the underside was painted white, the insignias whited-out. Even without glasses he saw it moving, sharp against the blue. It reminded him of a paper cross breezing on the lake. She was about that height. Mertin tilted his head back. When his neck was completely arched he saw her disappear over the near jungle. The engine had grown loud, knocking vibrations into the air, then was not loud, was only some vibrations then gone.

Mertin looked back at earth and the kids had moved in. Again they watched him, tried to look. Some were not tall enough to see over. They talked more quietly. When one kid's sister laughed the kid put his fingers between her teeth. They held sticks above the dark red water and looked ready to stir. They didn't dare touch. Mertin put his eyes on the sky. The planes came regularly, easily, no resistance.

As soon as the engines of one faded out, the next could be heard. It was a bass humming in the distance that quickly became louder and shook while you listened. Not all sounded alike. They came at different heights and the craft were different. Mertin saw two C-31's at great altitude. The bigger planes looked like birds he couldn't remember the name of. But the planes were too stiff. All the planes moved especially slow. They headed on straight lines to the north. A Cub came over so low Mertin saw the bomb racks welded under the wings. They were flying anything that would go up. Anything that could get to altitude could drop a load and if it didn't have alt it could mount a machine gun or cannon. The Cub could drop two one-hundred pounders or four of the fifties. A P-51

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chopped by faster than the others. Mertin picked out the rocket tubes and laughed. They were bringing together everything. The crazies had dug off the continent all the junk left from every war since they'd invented the machines. Some of the planes had desert camouflage. Mertin thought if age could damage they had it bagged. His side could take a slow boat. So he laughed. Maybe they had found more surplus braid, too, to pin on their air force tunics.

The children did not think of running away from or pointing at the airplanes. They knew them for what they were. Men drove the planes across the sky and did not have to climb hills, hit their toes on rocks, wade the river, or walk around the trees. The children never used the airplanes or went where they went so they had no interest. They did not want to go in them either because they heard, too, that the planes were not sure. Sometimes they did not come out of the sky. All that the children saw were here then gone. It was always that way. The oldest old man in the village remembered seeing airplanes when he was a boy. Only, he said, for years and years they never saw more than one, then much later sometimes two. They had thought it took the airplanes a long time to be built. Then they had to grow to a size large enough so they could be strong enough to fly.

Every ten seconds came a plane. Mertin counted them out. "Ten," he said and water splashed over his knees. A boy jumped back. It seemed for a second a fish had broke water among them. The others then put hands over their mouths. The boy held his arms above his head, the gesture of innocence. Mertin picked up the stick floating on the water. He rapped hands moving fast so that the flies buzzed off his neck at the same time. The kids let go of the bathtub quick.

"Go. To your fathers. I will tell them. Or I will deal deadly with you. Find your fathers."

He remembered about the men. They were back in the jungle on the hill. He had made them clear that hill. They were watching the planes from the height. Mertin told them to count like hell. He told them a small plane was one plane, a big plane was one plane, too. Some wanted to count a big plane as two or three. Some thought a small plane traveling low was a big plane and wanted the small plane to be two. They thought this was true also because the low plane was louder and if it was louder this was another way

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in which it was bigger. Then they did not know if the one big plane that was two planes was two big planes or two small planes. Mertin left fifty men standing in the dirt counting the planes like hell.

"Deadly," Mertin said, the kids ran. They sat under the trees. They folded their legs.

Mertin closed his eyes tight. He felt the sun on his throat and splashed water there. The planes came too periodically and were too loud for a man to sleep. Their sound was low vibrations that shook higher in pitch then went low pitch again to a growl in the back of the throat. The fade-out sounded at times like a faraway lawnmower. Mertin thought of a lawnmower at the end of City Park, Saturday noon, after class.

Mertin threw a frisbee and pretty soon he had to take off his shirt. He threw it some more, trying to get the spin that pulled a stall so it hung still in the hot air, for a full second if it was good. When they hit Mertin with the stall he would be running hard and overrun it. Mostly he ran perfect so it floated at the far end of his reach then settled on to the fingertips. Then Mertin still going forward rocketed it off his hip. The dogs followed the plastic as well as the men and women. The dogs could go on even if their tongues were dragging with foam on them. The dogs never stopped it, but suddenly everyone had to sit under the trees and drink beer and do some talking even though they were sick of talking. Mertin peeled an egg by crushing the shell in his fist so that the membrane did not tear and the shell went together again. He described, "I cracked an egg. I eat an egg. I ate an egg in my mouth." Or they peeled oranges and they did the dialog.

Mertin said, "After being introduced to Sylvia, Jose's fiancee, and meeting his date, Joseph goes to a party which a Surlandian official gives in honor of the newly arrived Americans."

One of the others said, "Say, do they throw these parties here often."

"No, just every now and then, without a doubt," Mertin said.

"I think this one's terrific," they said.

"Phil is drinking brandy," Mertin said.

"He isn't dancing," they said.

"Phil's not much of a dancer."

"He works late at the embassy. He must be very tired."

"I think he's waiting for his little chubby girl," Mertin said.

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Mertin said whoever made these up had to have been dropping at the time. They said no, it had to come straight from some bilingual peasant girls who ad-libbed into a mike. Then they stuck the sweet orange sections in each others' mouths, sometimes squirting the juice on the tongues. They went back inside the brick building, put on headphones, and listened to tapes.

Mertin remembered the faces of some of the men and women he had played with. In all probability, all but two were alive at this moment living somewhere in different capital cities. The other two were men who were probably dead on another continent, not the zoo. That was probable. A man that Mertin shot for in the last war had asked him to ignore probability. He was a fat, old Belgian and had pulled through a mortar hit which should have blinded him and left his arms permanently dangling like straws. But he was still shooting, hitting out to 300 yards, and it had absolutely nothing to do with probability, so he said. Later when he took automatic fire he did not pull through. He took it in the belly. He fell face first in the water and they did not see him again. They had to clear out of that particular zoo scene under cross fire. Wasn't the Belgian probably dead.

A plane flew across the sun and Mertin felt a shadow. Someone splashed water on his dozing face.

Mr. Mertin was falling out of the white. Water dripped back in and some drops fell on the orange dirt. The flies were buzzing off. Mertin ran his hands over his clothes until he found the web belt and the leather holster. The children shouted to each other about who moved the water or made the water move. They pulled the slow ones back by the elbows toward the trees.

"See the deadly," Mr. Mertin said in a big voice to them, half of him sticking out. Mr. Mertin pulled back on something and looked at a hole in it. Then it snapped together in his hand. The children called to one boy still looking his eyes into the water. He still touched the edge of the white. "Come away from the deadly, baby," they said to him. They saw the deadly together now in Mr. Mertin's hand. It was bigger than Mr. Mertin's hand and stuck out.

Mertin heard his girl suddenly calling, too. He smiled and turned his head so he could smile at her. She could not run because her belly was heavy with child. Mertin turned back and put the pistol to the kid's head. The kid broke his trance and looked up. He heard the others calling, the girl, too. The boy brushed the side

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of his head. Mertin let the gun barrel move off and it was one inch away.

"Run," Mertin said. The kid did as the girl fell on her knees by the bathtub. The kid would not let Mertin's girl grab him. He kept running to the trees where the other kids jabbered at him and called him baby. The girl was breathing hard, but she shouted to the children to go to the river and play with sticks and stones. The children sat under the trees. They watched the half of Mr. Mertin still sticking out, still holding a deadly in his hand.

The girl put her hand on his shoulder and showed Mertin what she brought. Mertin took her stick. He opened his mouth and took in all the meat. He chewed several times and tasted that it was burned liver. He threw the stick away.

"How is it for you. Do you need water."

"It's fine," Mertin said. He tried to hand her the gun. She moved away and he smiled. "You fed me," he said. "Take it as a gift."

She would not take it and held her hands behind her back. "It's a gift," he said. He laughed and rubbed her round, bare head. "No dice," he said. "Then put it on the ground for me with my clothes." She took it now and he used a hand to hold one of her breasts. Her tit was warm and slippery with sweat. He shook his head and scattered flies away from his eyes. Mertin asked if she saw and heard the planes. He squeezed, then let go and pointed. It was high, but they heard this one well.

"They are counting like hell," she said.

"But what do you think they're for," Mertin said. "Tell me what you think." She splashed water on his chest then back. He made her stop splashing and get the sun-block out of his trousers pocket and rub more on his shoulders. "Now what are all these airplanes doing," he said.

"They are men going to town. That's how other men go to town when it's too far to walk or ride."

"Yes," Mertin said. "A lot of men. They must be flying in for a ball game. A double header maybe. Do you think it is a double header."

"Yes."

"You don't know what one is," Mertin said. "I don't remember either, but it's still a double header. It's going to be a twi-night. Does that sound good."

"Yes," then she said, "Is this the time you said about."

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"Lower," he said. He closed his eyes while she rubbed in the sun-block. The sun-block smelled like coconuts. Little had he told them. It was political news: there are bad men, they left the firearms a hundred years ago, that is their white bathtub there with the rain in it, now they wish to come back, bringing puppets. Mertin trained them using the rusted guns that had no stocks and did not fire. They enjoyed the marching because they did it how they wanted dancing instead of stepping. He yelled hard at them so they covered their ears and talked to each other or put down the guns. They would not fight without money. Mertin would be paid first, then he would pay them or they would drop their weapons and sit down and watch the cows. He thought to get paid they would have to use heads again.

In the zoo you had to use heads even when you did not like them. You did not like heads because heads were heavy to carry around, that was the worst, bulkiness when you were trying to move lightly and quietly. You slung them between two bearers or strung them on gutline and just dragged the heads on the ground. For sure you did not dig them being heads either, the eyes and tongues and stuff, but that got better. The heads stayed the same. It was someone moving in with you and they got no worse and you knew them. It would be politer to use ears or fingers, but when they tried the joo-boos went around cutting off more than one each time. They could take one man and cut the man into two or three men. Sure they would be asked to make the counts again with heads. Mertin was paid for each head. For the weapons he was paid extra, but heads logically were worth much more. If they ever had all the heads they would have all the weapons, wouldn't they. Mertin paid his men from the weapons bonus. They could take the money to town and buy more maize than they could farm in a year. He always told them so, this coin is worth more than one year. If this war the town was bombed the coin was worth zero. Mertin of course kept all the head money for himself. There was assumed risk.

In the last war the men loved the heads because of their luck. They were crazy about them, had names for them and talked to them always careful to whisper in the ear. Once when they were pinned behind an earth bank they lined the heads on top. It was the joo-boos' idea. Then the other side could not make their men fire because they saw the heads. Mertin slipped two men around.

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When they opened up again they got more heads. They had coffee sacks for them that time. But the heads could take a beating and you were still paid as long as they had been heads to start with. Durability was a goddamn plus with the heads.

"Is this what time. What time do you mean," he said to her.

She looked at Mr. Mertin's back. She was afraid that it had been made red already and she rubbed cream there. "When my child comes will it be gray." When Mr. Mertin laughed at her she said, "The old people say it happened once."

"The child won't be gray," Mr. Mertin said. "He may be black or white." She believed him, then he said the child probably would have stripes and she did not know if she believed him. She had never seen a child that way. Such a child would have to be buried.

"When the child comes will the time be gone," she said. She held her hands on his shoulders. She could not feel the same bones as her own men had. There was more flesh and muscle.

"It will be the middle of the time," he said.

"When."

"The middle of the time for your damned child with stripes."

Her slap hit Mertin on the neck and drove his head forward even though her hand was soft. He had not seen her face. The zoo faces never showed anything except at the nostrils. The nostrils at the extremes were flat or flared, dullness or anger. They were hard to read. He grabbed her wrist. He felt in the dirt for the pistol. He had it and the kids shouted from under the trees.

"See," she said.

He had pushed the pistol in her face and twisted her wrist, but she was not yelling. Her nostrils had the dilated, pleased look. He put the gun between her eyes. She shook her arm where he held it and never looked at the gun. Then she opened her hand. In the white palm was a honey bee. "See," she said.

The children looked and pointed. They gathered and watched him throw away her arm and slide under the water until they saw less than half a man.

"You. Get out of here. Go now," Mertin said. "Get. Tell one man to report the airplanes. Tell these children to leave."

"Yes," she said. "The children will not leave you."

"You tell them."

"They want to see you."

"They've seen me," Mertin said. "They're in my way and I'll

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shoot them and I'll shoot you next." Shoot was a word not in their language. "Deadly," Mertin said.

She told the children to go. Some of them followed her. The rest pointed at her heavy belly and slapped her shins and thighs with the sticks. She moved slowly because of the weight and when she walked her legs were wide. She shook her head at Mr. Mertin because not all the children would follow. Some of those hitting her stopped and stayed.

Mr. Mertin told them to get away. They waited until Mr. Mertin stood up. The water poured off him. The flies buzzed off. He held the deadly at his side. The children ran to the side where Mr. Mertin stepped out. They saw the bottom half of the man standing in front of the white. They pointed and made laughs.

Mertin stood on his clothes and looked at the kids. He could not understand jabbering. He had the pistol in his hand and let it hang at his side. A kid jumped forward. The others pushed him and jabbered. The boy was the one Mertin had touched with the pistol. He had a scab on his lip. Mertin let him come on. The kid held out his hand. He moved the other hand and he had a stick in it. "What," Mertin said. Mertin held out his empty left hand.

He touched Mertin between the legs with the stick. He moved the stick back and forth. Then he dropped the stick and ran calling to the others. Mertin raised the pistol. When he raised he felt water run down his ribs and legs and hairs so slowly.

Now there was a high yell. The girl stood in the line of fire. She knelt and held the kid. The kid was telling her something and pointing at Mertin. The other kids were vanished to the jungle. She straightened up and took the kid by the hand. She stood before Mertin so that her swollen belly was profiled against the scenic trees. The kid said something about the man and she knelt again. He aimed the pistol with a movement you could not see. She rubbed her forehead against the boy's head.

In the jungle the children shouted it about this time. The airplane was so low it was as a sky of fast rain and flies. The trees blew. The children covered their ears and their hands took the sounds away until the sounds went away. The sounds stopped breathing. The trees quieted. Boys and girls sat until the sun moved, but no sound came from the deadly. From this they made many laughs. They stepped out of the green jungle.

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PATRICIA GOEDICKE

Counting the Waves

Letters from friends, and presences, keep appearing
Like cycles of the year

As a great wave draws up, draws in on itself
And then crashes

With all that wealth of water
Coming in

The children in the playground know it,
Holding hands in a ring, with such serious faces

They surge to the center
And then out, and then

With no surprise but delight
In to the center again. . . .

At the checkout counter in the supermarket
Someone you thought you'd never

Returns again, from the windy path
That twists along the horizon,

Out in the parking lot we shake hands,
At the Chinese restaurant there are ten of us

Even after fifty years

Sheep graze in the apple orchard
Bombarded by fruit, the sweetness of harvest

As, after every absence
The doorbell rings, surprise

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Every moment we live
Here, at the crossroads of the world

(The children know it, but we forget)
Every accident is possible:

Meeting each other, and being met
Suddenly, in the middle of the street

No matter what darkness, what separation
Between the incoming and the long outgoing

Like comets in their courses passing, like wheels
Of fiery coincidence approaching

Though we cannot count on them, still

Far out to sea there's another
Gathering.

Making a Double Angel

I will lie down here in the snow,
So
In Edgewater
By the sea
I will open my coat out
On either side
Like a magic carpet,
The snow will rise
Great white poufs of it
To soften
Your descent? No
You stand above,
Unbuttoning
Your fly to my raised skirt

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And fall like a giant tree
Or like the thunderbolt
You are
On top of dark me
Making a double angel
Our woolen clothes
At night
Like thick wings
Thrash,
Languorously
Kissing snowflakes
Away
With white eyebrows
From smooth cheeks
Halos of hair
Rise
For the moon's behind
The oak tree,
Your lovely prick
Dangles a huge
Shining star
Falling, yes
But I catch it
In my red mitten
For nothing changes,
Nothing melts
In memory
No rats squeak
Above us,
On the bridge
Cars keep
Slicing by,
Roaring through the dark
Their prying headlights
Ignorant of us
Two children
Playing
This one moment
Out of heaven
Even the snow supports us.

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ROGER J. PORTER

Unspeakable Practices, Writable Acts: Franklin's *Autobiography*

NAIVE CRITICS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY seek to find in the work a faithful mirror of lived experience; when they do not, they turn to biographies for greater authenticity. More knowing critics acknowledge the made-up, story-telling aspect of narrative; all autobiographers, they believe, create fictions of one sort or another, however verifiable individual moments in their accounts may be, however "true" large swaths of recorded experience. The motives behind such imaginative discourse vary, of course, from Nabokov's complex epistemology to James' ineluctably novelistic mind. Perhaps the most common instance of this need to shape a story is the compensatory one: the autobiographer creates an order in his or her book that was absent in the life; if the person failed to make the life into the desired work of art, predictable and composed with a discernible order, then the artful form of the writing will stand in its place. Here is a succinct expression of this view by a recent critic:

> The act of writing autobiography offers itself as an occasion not for celebration, but for commencing one's existence as a personality. I believe that most autobiographers create their discourse in order to conceive and sustain a self other than that which they have established—or which they have failed to establish—in their engagement of actual experience. The autobiographer, I believe, typically undertakes to press the resources of language in ways in which he has been unable to press the resources of history. He endeavors to elaborate from words that sense of reality, that feeling of freed individuation, which the components of his desperately mediated life have not permitted him experientially to develop. For such beings the act of writing autobiography declares itself not as a first but as a last emotion of life; not as a hymn to peace and plenty, but as a final, extraordinarily inventive attempt at therapy.[1]

[1]Peter Glassman, "Acts of Enclosure," THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. XXX, No. 1, (Spring 1977), p. 140.

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Such a theory would not seem to work for a man as successful, confident and self-confessedly exemplary as Franklin. No one in our national life has more grandly "press[ed] the resources of history"—statesman, diplomat, writer of laws, inventor, scientist, educator, essayist, editor, printer, philosopher, public benefactor. Franklin's motive for writing does not seem to be sparked by any uncertainty about the mysteries of the self (the "dark forests" that D. H. Lawrence lamented Franklin had excluded from his account), or by a desire to explore the meaning of life in the act of writing, or by an urge to tell his story because he doubts the actualness of his inner being. On the contrary, no autobiographer begins with more assurance and self-congratulation:

> Having emerg'd from the Poverty and Obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a State of Affluence and some Degree of Reputation in the World, and having gone so far thro' life with a considerable Share of Felicity, the conducing Means I made use of, which, with the Blessing of God, so well succeeded, my Posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own Situations, and therefore fit to be imitated.[2]

And yet Franklin's *Autobiography* is a work which creates that very sense of confidence and ease only by revealing the constant surveillance that Franklin needed to apply to his life and the constant effort *in the writing* that makes the life appear as frictionless and effortless as possible. James Cox has remarked that Franklin's account is notable for its absence of crises and dramatic turning points;[3] in fact, Franklin speaks, appropriately for a printer, of various "faults" which he calls merely "errata," and would, if he could live his life again, correct in a "second edition" (that is, another life). Difficult moments in the life are smoothed over by the application of tact, generosity, or, in textual terms, euphemisms. Potentially explosive episodes in the work which beg for exploration and analysis are passed by with a rhetorical equanimity and comic self-irony that belie the problem of self-evaluation they inevitably raise. To be exemplary is not to chance too much in the realm of introspection; the risks are taken mostly in the social and political

[2]THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, ed. *Leonard W. Labaree et al.*, New Haven, 1964, p. 43. Further references to this edition are to be found in parentheses following the passage.

[3]James Cox, "Autobiography and America," *Aspects of Narrative*, ed. J. Hillis Miller (New York, 1971), pp. 173–98.

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domains, where private fears may be skirted or at least held in check, and where civic government coincides with self-government.

Where does the reluctance to probe the self originate? To begin with, such introspection represents for Franklin an indulgence that runs contrary to the more pressing needs of a rough and tumble existence that threatened to overwhelm the precarious civilization of Philadelphia in the early eighteenth century. Franklin several times mentions incidents involving relatives, friends and acquaintances who suddenly experienced a frightening loss of stability in their lives. His friend James Ralph leaves family and country only to become totally dependent on Franklin's charity in order to avoid financial ruin; one friend succumbs to drink and wastes his life; another becomes hostile and excessively belligerent, and is disgraced in his dealings with Philadelphia's citizenry; a third quits civilization for the Barbados never to be heard from again. Amidst these cautionary tales of horror Franklin assures us that the only way to avoid a similar fate is through the proper application of discipline, tact, and control. In a culture that provided greater order and leisure than Franklin experienced, one might turn inward without feeling he was squandering his mental energies; but where life was chancy and chaos threatened at every turn, or at least where one tended to perceive matters that way, self-questioning was doubtless irrelevant and certainly distracting. Instead of engaging in a romantic exploration of private values Franklin turned to the more public world—first of collective wisdom and shared moral assumptions, later of public service and community enlightenment.[4]

The centerpiece of the *Autobiography* is Franklin's project of arriving at moral perfection, and everyone is familiar with the lined pages of his notebook, the days of the week across the top, and the initials of the thirteen virtues, such as temperance, order, frugality and industry, down the side, and the "little black spots" marking every fault against those virtues committed that day. This plan may stand for an entire conception of self in the *Autobiography*—life as a grid, where external behavior is primary, where faults and virtues may be plotted and balanced, and where the self, or at least its darker urges, may be transformed into whatever can be of value. The entire autobiography is an exercise in dramatizing the appli-

[4]For a further discussion of these issues, I wish to cite the unpublished paper by Thomas C. Bailey: "The Rhetoric of Self: Benjamin Franklin at the Edge."

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cation of these virtues to the smoothing over of difficult moments in the life, and the success that ensues from keeping unruly emotions at bay. But Franklin cannot tell too much. Like Plato on the arts, he believes that too much revelation of what cannot be managed will harm *someone*. His strategy is not merely to convert inner passion into usable history, but to show how control, rules, and effort may be employed to give the appearance of effortlessness. Franklin's progress in eliminating vices is charted by the erasure of the black marks—significant again for a printer, for whom black smirches on a clean page would be anathema, and who tells us how proud he is for having returned borrowed books "soon and clean." The eradication of the black marks becomes a metaphor for life and writing: if the darker, difficult aspects of experience are not dwelt upon, they will appear hardly to have been there at all.

I do not wish to linger on the psychoanalytic possibilities of Franklin's obsession with sweeping the streets clean of dirt, or his absolute loathing of and preoccupation with the removal of mud, dust, slush and mire, or the grime and smoke on the insides of gaslight globes which inhibited the lighting of Philadelphia's streets. He is pleased to "enlighten" all the city with his new inventions, whether a better globe, a stove, or electricity. Nevertheless, getting rid of dirt, black marks and even savage Indians is, in Franklin's calculus, all the same: the removal of what threatens to inhibit culture. His fear of what cannot be controlled and contained is manifestly great. Here is a passage describing his experience with Indians who had been given rum as a reward for signing a peace treaty.

> We found [the Indians] had made a great Bonfire in the Middle of the Square. They were all drunk Men and Women, quarrelling and fighting. Their dark-color'd Bodies, half naked, seen only by the gloomy Light of the Bonfire, running after and beating one another with Firebrands, accompanied by their horrid Yellings, form'd a Scene the most resembling our Ideas of Hell that could well be imagin'd. There was no appeasing the Tumult, and we retired to our Lodging. At Midnight a Number of them came thundering at our Door, demanding more Rum; of which we took no Notice. The next Day, sensible they had misbehav'd in giving us that Disturbance, they sent three of their old Counsellors to make their Apology. The Orator acknowledg'd the Fault, but laid it upon the Rum; and then endeavor'd to excuse the Rum, by saying, "*The great Spirit who made all things made every thing for some Use, and whatever Use he design'd any thing for, that Use it should always*

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> *be put to; Now, when he made Rum, he said,* LET THIS BE FOR INDIANS TO GET DRUNK WITH. *And it must be so.*" And indeed if it be the Design of Providence to extirpate these Savages in order to make room for Cultivators of the Earth, it seems not improbable that Rum may be the appointed Means. (pp. 198-99)

Franklin provides justification for his belief by recourse to providence and cosmic order; what underlies his position is fear of violence and savagery, and apparently not just that of others but his own. On numerous occasions Franklin recounts his own anger and violent urges, but backs off from any attempt to explore them in depth. There are several such episodes, but Franklin mentions them almost in passing, as if seeking to create the impression that the elicited passions need not be considered too strenuously. In one significant account he pitches overboard into the Delaware a drunken friend who has refused to help row their boat. Franklin will not take him back into the boat until the man is exhausted and waterlogged; but Franklin will not dwell on his own capacity for violence, and he quickly moves on to other matters. He must keep control of himself, grease the paths of his march to success and, in the actual writing, convey an image of one who has avoided the "dangerous Time of Youth and the hazardous Situations I was sometimes in. . . . " (p. 115). Nature or natural inclination must always be tamed by nurture and cultivation; what are prized are the clean book of the life and the immaculate, unspotted page of the virtues. Life is a kind of morality play for Franklin; overcoming and concealment are two ways of projecting an image of the successful self. Too much revelation is not unseemly in a puritanical sense, but it must be suppressed if he would avoid charges of egotism and make his way as a socially compliant being.

Franklin's book dwells on escapes of various kinds, and here we may see his characteristic complexity: escaping from dangers that promise to narrow his existence allows him on the one hand to avoid disorder and on the other to keep his world open and flexible. Too much fluidity is detrimental to Franklin's purpose: fluids in fact are his great enemy, and nothing terrifies him more than a drunken Dutchman who falls into the sea and almost drowns. Later he describes himself as a "graceful and easy" swimmer, and as making his way in the world "swimmingly"; he even speaks of a friend whose frugality barely allowed him to "keep his Head much longer above Water" (p. 112). When his father discouraged Frank-

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lin from writing verses "I escap'd being a poet" (p. 60), which in his formulation meant being a beggar. Poverty and obscurity are fates worse than death for him; obscurity and darkness must be set against enlightenment in his world. His discipline allows him to achieve freedom, whether by escaping a liaison with several thieving prostitutes on a boat, or by eluding financial ruin through his famous industry. Yet too much rigidity is no less harmful: escaping a tyrannical brother whose indenturing of Franklin threatened to cut off his freedom allowed Franklin to expand his world. Caution and control must always be exercised; the threat of ruin lies all around him.

Above all Franklin wishes to give us the impression that a rational life can be constructed with will. There are no problematics about his identity, no modern impulse to take the self *as* a problem, because introspection would be the mark of a man sidetracked into self-consciousness. For Franklin too much dwelling on the self is the most seductive threat of all, worse than those thieving prostitutes because it robs one of the ability to project oneself actively into the world. Cultivation of the self is justified only as a way of expanding its gains in public terms: the project to arrive at moral perfection does not stop in the realm of the private—soon after its formulation Franklin plans to create an organization to disseminate and inculcate its methods, a mutually self-helping group called the "Society of the Free and Easy." It is the ease of being in the world that Franklin seeks to communicate to us; not in the sense that life is providentially secure or even arbitrarily fortunate, but that through accommodation and energy he can achieve anything he wishes.

This is doubtless why the book never rises to an emotional climax or crescendo, but is accretive in its structure. What I mean is that for Franklin all experiences weigh equally, no single activity is more laden with significance for him than any other. Because both street cleaning and diplomatic negotiation are crucial enterprises for Franklin, he gives us the impression of a man who marches through life with a sense of dedication and ease. The writing itself softens whatever anxiety, self-doubt, fear or turmoil he might have felt about himself. These fears, as I've suggested, are present, particularly in the images of men disappearing or going under or remaining in obscurity. But the fears do not seem to Franklin to be paramount, or at least he does not wish to convey such an impres-

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sion to us. It is the witty and outwitting side of himself that he offers, a comic compliance with circumstances that allows him to transcend them. But "transcendence" is probably not the best term to apply to Franklin; the very fact of an accretive style, a structuring of successive moments, and a book written over a period of eighteen years and on two continents says something about his disarmingly casual approach to the self. Like the book he writes, a concern with his inner being can be taken up momentarily and dropped at leisure; to suggest too much urgency or intensity or "transcendence" would be to acknowledge either a private or public anxiety he is, ironically, at great pains to dispel, or a lofty aim that is at odds with his insistence on the matter-of-fact and the every-day.

The writing, in its unadorned chronicling style, testifies to the desire to suppress individualism or at least not to assert an identity so particularized and distinct that it will run counter to the democratic ideal in which the common man with the proper will may achieve whatever Franklin has. The book ends with events in 1757, and it may be that an account of the later career, when Franklin's pre-eminence was so lofty, would throw off the balance between open-eyed youth and rising public figure, and make of the protagonist a hero too formidable to imitate. And so too, just as the worst sin of *living* is isolation from others, so the worst sin—or erratum—of *writing* would be the cultivation of a style so formal, singular and idiosyncratic that it would counteract his implied democracy. Franklin's fear of rhetoric is not unlike his fear of claiming too much for himself; he practices a simple, inelegant, almost story-telling style. A simple formlessness can signify freedom for Franklin (his very name means, of course, "free man"); tied to no formal narrative convention, he seems to make up his story as he goes, just as he is the American hero as self-made man. And as Cox has noted, Franklin can stop where he wants to because he is not trapped by a need to see his life whole. I would add that it does change from one vantage point or perspective to another; it is all of a piece, and each piece resembles every other.

Franklin's style never lets us see the pressures generated within the self. Everywhere the matter-of-fact tone belies any inner struggle he must have confronted in his choice of behavior. He scrupulously avoids the language of subjectivity because it would raise issues that might divert his own and possibly the reader's at-

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tention from greater imperatives, namely the need to counteract the dangers he saw all around him. There is no sense of urgency, no pressure to strike out at an unyielding reality, but nevertheless we are struck by how much sheer activity the *Autobiography* contains, how much it is a record of constant business and busyness. Stylistically this continuous acting takes the form of paragraphs consisting of one declarative sentence after another, as one public activity follows close on the heels of the next: I wrote, I discovered, I suggested, I advocated, I established, I formed, I planned, and so on.

But in all of this reporting Franklin never gives us the impression that he struggled against a resistant and raw world; his tone suggests a fellow enormously pleased with himself and delighted by the public's reception of his character and work. He is always knowing and ingenuous at the same time, a combination that permits him to take things as they come. Here is the characteristically insouciant speaker:

> In order to secure in Credit and Character as a Tradesman, I took care not only to be in *Reality* Industrious and frugal, but to avoid all *Appearances* of the Contrary. I drest plainly; I was seen at no Places of idle Diversion; I never went out a-fishing or shooting; a Book, indeed, sometimes debauch'd me from my Work; but that was seldom, snug, and gave no Scandal: and to show that I was not above my Business, I sometimes brought home the Paper I purchas'd at the Stores, thro' the Streets on a Wheelbarrow. Thus being esteem'd an industrious thriving young Man, and paying duly for what I bought, the Merchants who imported Stationary solicited my Custom, others propos'd supplying me with Books, and I went on swimmingly. In the mean time Keimer's Credit and Business declining daily, he was at last forc'd to sell his Printinghouse to satisfy his Creditors. He went to Barbadoes, and there lived some Years, in very poor Circumstances. (pp. 125-6)

The obvious openings for a discussion about appearance and reality, image and interior selfhood, are never seized. In fact the content of the passage is appropriately conveyed by a poise that cannot afford much self-contemplation. Its very success depends upon our not asking too many questions. And yet that is exactly what we are inclined to do. We are impatient with the frictionless bearing of the work; it all works so easily because Franklin himself seems to have. Every setback becomes a lesson in how to turn things around in the future, every criticism can be corrected in the next edition.

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We are left not so much with the self-congratulating, pompous Franklin of Lawrence's caricature, but a speaker who knows how fragile the self really is. The satisfaction that comes from his ability to keep secret his inner conflicts leads to his own ironic tone, where an ability to mock his own formulae for success keeps the *Autobiography* from being as egotistical as might otherwise be the case.

Franklin, I am contending, knew that he had an abundant capacity for vanity, aggression, and luxuriant pleasure. But his constant fear, expressed directly or by implication, is that the exercise of these impulses would render his life meaningless. It is not, as has often been claimed, Puritan caution or Quaker reticence that lies behind these fears, but instead a cagey, wily view of himself, and what amounts almost to a pleasure in the act of mock-self-effacement, in secrecy and cunning. He engages the reader even as he refuses to give much away. Franklin takes Philadelphia and then the *Autobiography* for his stages, and he tries out a series of roles, enjoying the theatrical posturing and shifting of costume. The *Autobiography* is, in essence, the performance of a skilled and splendid conman. Just when we think we know Franklin he escapes our grasp; at one moment we can say that Ben Franklin is a rank optimist and proud booster of civic virtues; the next moment that he has a dark vision of human rapacity and sees how much manipulation is necessary to effect even minimal social gains. But the autobiography will not settle into any comfortable conclusions about human action and personal awareness. Over and over we have the voice of an ironist whose strategy is to undercut himself even as he applauds himself. We often wonder where the real Franklin is.

Here, in a passage that closes Part II of the *Autobiography*, Franklin shows how emotions may get out of hand; what is important for my purpose is not so much Franklin's need to subdue passion, but the ironic way he survives with credit whether he does or does not subdue:

> In reality there is perhaps no one of our natural Passions so hard to subdue as *Pride*. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself. You will see it perhaps often in this History. For even if I could conceive that I had compleatly overcome it, I should probably [be] proud of my Humility. (p. 160)

Even as he suggests his failings whichever way he has it, Franklin manages to have it—in the positive sense—both ways. A man as

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clever as Franklin in this passage is hard to trust, but not hard to admire. Finally, I want to say that Franklin knows that the self as a concept is something that can be created as much in the writing as in the long process of living. The two are related in that the life has prepared the writer to compose the self; but for Franklin this lesson takes the specific form of circumspection, guile and, in both senses of the word, craft. In the deliberate act of frustrating our desires and thus keeping us at bay, "now and then peep[ing] out and show[ing]" himself, Franklin asserts that autobiography is not merely a retrospective genre but a continuous engagement between self and audience, an artful construction that matches that of the life itself.

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JOHN SIMON

Between the Conception and the Re-creation Falls *The Shadow Line*[1]

A LONG TIME AGO I WROTE that a simple rule obtained for the adapting of plays and novels into movies: if it was worth doing, it couldn't be done; if it could be done, it wasn't worth doing. Richard Kostelanetz did me the honor of dubbing this Simon's Law, and whereas I still believe that it holds for drama when adapted to the screen, I am no longer quite so sure, now that I have crossed the shadow line, whether it applies as rigidly to fiction.

Of course, speaking as purists (and I hope there are still enough of those left), we might well agree that any sort of adaptation is an act of vulgarization, if not indeed of vandalism. For we all know that form and content in a work of art are inseparable, and that he who meddles with one of them, inevitably muddies both. The one exception might be the case of the original author's turning into his own scenarist; yet even then, assuming that he can recreate the initial inspiration (a big if, that), is he likely to be as good a scenarist as he was a fictionist? Otherwise, why didn't he become a screenwriter in the first place? The pay is much better.

Still, since even the purists among us must be willing to test their purism by fire—we cannot admire a cloistered purism—let us entertain the notion that a good novel can be turned into a decent movie; for, unlike a play, a novel resembles a movie both in its ability to move freely through time and space, and in its essentially narrative rather than conversational character. One major problem, though, is apt to be length: a novel may be too long for a movie, and require excessive pruning; a short story may be too brief for a movie, and demand inordinate padding. That leaves the novella, which is just about the right length, and so the hundred odd pages of Conrad's *The Shadow Line* might have seemed ideal cinema fodder to some innocent Pole.

Actually, two innocent Poles: Andrzej Wajda, the famous screen and stage director, and his co-scenarist Boleslaw Sulik, who in 1976 turned *The Shadow Line* into a movie co-produced by the Corporation for Film Production, "Film Units," the X Film Unit of Poland (frankly, I don't know whether that X represents the Tenth Film Unit or Product X) and Thames Television of Great Britain. There is a certain curse weighing on most movies made for television: they tend to have small budgets and be designed for the small screen, with small actors doing things that will look good in miniature; but it could be presumed that the presence of a bona fide Polish film unit might have redressed the balance. Not so, alas, in this screenplay "after [to quote the official brochure] the novel of J. Conrad

[1] This talk was given to the Joseph Conrad Society at the 1978 meeting of the Modern Language Association in New York.

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Korzeniowski," who, as we shall presently see, may not be the great Polish-born English novelist, but some kind of Polish hack who anglicized the spelling of his middle name.

If Wajda and Sulik had examined the record of sound films based on Conrad (by "sound" I mean the noun, and definitely not the adjective), they might easily have faltered.[2] Little good can be said for John Cromwell's *Victory*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Sabotage* (based on *The Secret Agent*), John Brahm and Bretaigne Windust's *Face to Face* (the first episode of which is based on *The Secret Sharer*) and Richard Brooks's *Lord Jim,* all of which I have seen, or for *Razumov,* a 1937 version of *Under Western Eyes,* which I have not seen, but which its very obscurity tends to discredit. Had they made their film later than 1976, our gallant Poles might have been given pause also by *The Duellists* of Ridley Scott, a 1977 film based on "The Duel"; not to mention the as yet unreleased *Apocalypse Now* of Francis Ford Coppola, which, whenever it comes out and whatever its worth, will have little to do with *Heart of Darkness,* on which it is loosely based. Had they considered filmizations of Conrad's stage works as well, they might have split their sides—as I did—over *Laughing Anne* (1953), whose director, if it had one, I can no longer recall, and whose highlight was Margaret Lockwood's crooning, in an appropriately smoke-filled dive, a ballad called "I've Fallen in Deep Water," which might be the theme song for all adapters of Conrad.

All but one, that is. The one glorious exception—does it or doesn't it prove the rule?—is Sir Carol Reed's *Outcast of the Islands* (1952), a film version of, I grant you, a lesser work, but a brilliant one, on which William Fairchild served as scenarist. The film is, in some ways, better than the underlying original. As the late Charles Thomas Samuels pointed out, the movie wisely omits Conrad's version of native patois worthy of Edgar Rice Burroughs; gives us a long kissing sequence that conveys "the entire yielding of a soul that Conrad required but lacked the courage even to describe"; and, in general, provides "inventions and illustrations [that] give an immediacy and force to what in Conrad often becomes an unfortunate piling up of adjectives." Finally, the movie avoids those words that "cannot free themselves from moral condemnation and thus encourage a moral distance that drains the story of power."

Well, as you shall see, the film or telefilm version of *The Shadow Line* is no *Outcast of the Islands.* The first thing that Sulik and Wajda did not take into consideration was the fact that not very much happens in this novella. This is often the case with Conrad, not necessarily to his detriment: although much thought, feeling, description, imagery, suggestion and even sheer busyness may crowd into a work, in terms of actual filmable plot there may be precious little to go on. The problem is particularly grave in *The Shadow Line,* where the central theme is an inner struggle (barely accessible even to the subtlest camera) whose chief outer equivalent is a prolonged stasis: a ship becalmed at sea, a situation bereft of

[2] I owe some of the following data to Eugene L. Miller of Appalachian State University.

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movement. Of the sort of conventional "adventure" in which *An Outcast of the Islands* abounds, there is virtually none in this much later, quieter, more mature work.

Nevertheless, the early sequences of the movie, some of them shot on location in Bangkok, show an adequate feeling for atmosphere and montage, and are photographed quite handsomely. Already, however, I object to Marek Kondrat, the one Polish actor in an otherwise British cast, who portrays the protagonist with an exaggeration of rather obvious emotions, an excess of unambivalent emphasis, and a rodentlike face that is not calculated to win us over.

My first sense of real discomfort occurred when I fully absorbed Kondrat's unpleasingly accented voice (I assume it is Kondrat's, though the accent, to my ears, does not always sound typically Polish). It is all very well for Joseph Conrad to have had to the end of his days a thick Polish accent that many considered impenetrable; why, however, should this protagonist, whom Conrad never explicitly labels as being himself, have such an accent? Soon enough things get worse in the film, in the form of a totally un-Conradian interpolation: an episode in which the hero pores over a packet of letters from his uncle back in Poland. This packet includes, along with photographs of Conrad's—or should I say J. Conrad Korzeniowski's?—family and past abodes, Polish newspapers, and admonishments not to forget one's native tongue. Here the soundtrack actually goes Polish as the hero reads out loud his uncle's patriotic words. As if this were not enough, the young man's purpose is stated as the need "to show that a man from a country with no sea can be as good a sailor as anyone." This is as absurd as if we were told that our author, even though he became a Conrad with a C rather than a K, remained as good a Pole as any Konrad with no C.

Quite aside from the uncouthness of this propaganda (which may or may not have been foisted on the filmmakers) this piece of untruth—Conrad's uncle actually encouraged his nephew to become as good a Britisher as possible—does grave offense in limiting the universality of *The Shadow Line.* For it is both true and misleading to call this novella, as Professor J. I. M. Stewart does in *Eight Modern Writers,* "a directly autobiographical narrative." However much the work may be based on events from Conrad's early life, the author did all he could to broaden the scope into, as he put it, "a presentation of certain facts associated with the change from youth, carefree and fervent, to a more self-conscious and more poignant period of maturer life." Surely, then, we are dealing with a *rite de passage;* the difficult nautical feat that the hero has to accomplish is much more than nautical: he has to possess his own soul in patience through terrible, fever-ridden doldrums, and thus also set an example to his crew—enable both them and himself to survive. He does not have to impress anyone with how good a sailor a man from a nonmaritime country can be; he has to impress himself and those around him with his self-control, perseverance, and moral fortitude. Moreover, the deadening, viscous immobility that glues itself to the young captain is no doubt also an objective

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correlative for the accidia that tends to possess him, that may have been the real cause of his quitting his previous job, and that (if one wishes to be biographical) was also one of Conrad's serious psychic problems.

Little of this is conveyed by Wajda's film, in which we are treated, among other abominations, to the hero's name actually being given as Korzeniowski. The difficulty may also be a linguistic one, by which I do not just mean Wajda's poor comprehension of English (a known fact, to which I myself can testify), but also—indeed especially—something more important. I give as example the jolt I experienced when I heard early on the following bit of voiceover narration: "And so I left Captain Kent's ship like a bird leaves a comfortable branch." My initial discomfiture stemmed from that *like* used as a conjunction—surely Conrad could not have perpetrated it. The text reads: "And suddenly I left all this, I left it in that, to us, inconsequential manner in which a bird flies away from a comfortable branch." Not only did Sulik and Wajda foist bad English on Conrad, they also misunderstood and flattened out his imagery. The point here is not just that a man's leaving a safe job is comparable to a bird's flitting off to another branch. That would be trivial and old hat. The text introduces an *us,* a breed of human observers to whom such flight *seems* inconsequential. But it is implied that to the bird the flight may have meaning, and is even more likely to have consequence. The truth is that we do not understand our own moves any more than those of a bird. Granted that the verbal trope may be too much to absorb along with the film's visual images; in that case, however, hadn't one best leave it out altogether?

It is this same lack of subtle perception that characterizes the entire adaptation. Quite a few early sequences are devoted to showing the hero embroiled with a variety of corrupt and brutal Eastern or Easternized Western merchant types, whose chicaneries he must endure in trying to load his ship. These adventitious episodes derive presumably from Reed's *Outcast of the Islands,* where, however, they were as germane to the central theme as here they are not. And they are not even invented or filmed with enough originality or excitement to compensate for their utter irrelevance. They may, however, be meant to show Marxist audiences the evils of a capitalist society.

Once we get on board ship and hoist sail, things do not get appreciably better. Wajda is a gifted—in some of his films, great—director, true enough; here, his visual sense often serves him in good stead. There are some very fine shots of the ship and the watery bog that paralyzes it, even though at times the movement of the water looks less like that of a sea, however becalmed, than of a studio tank gently stirred around the edges. But other things go gravely wrong. Wajda cannot, as Conrad can, convey the multiplicity of minute goings-on above and below deck, and in the surrounding seascape. There is no sense here, except very rarely, of the sights and sounds of shipboard life that have a fascination—perhaps a veritable sinister charm—even when a lack of wind and quinine spells imminent doom.

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Thus, for example, the soundtrack, instead of giving us the unsilent silence of the sea—the intricate harmonies of almost subliminal water, wood, and canvas sounds in their pure state—bursts out with the music of Wojciech Kilar and Lech Branski. I imagine that one of these gents provided the not unhaunting triadic, high, staccato theme on the solo piano (pretty and moody, but what is a piano doing there?), whereas the other supplied the truly abhorrent pseudo-Chopin concerto that takes over whenever the wind fills up the sails, and especially when the ship makes triumphantly for Singapore, all her sails gibbous and billowing. In the story, to be sure, the ailing, exhausted men barely managed to haul up, with superhuman effort, the mainsail and square the mainyard.

From a rather lengthy list of grievances, let me select in particular the silliness of such in-jokes as references to a pair of non-Conradian sailors named Kubrick and Wright, the former needing no identification, the latter probably an ironic *hommage* to Basil Wright, the British filmmaker and critic who has often written about Wajda. And I must also remark on how much the crew of the ship, other than Burns and Ransome, are slighted by the movie. We need not agree with F. R. Leavis when he perceives a large part of the novella's success in "the pervasive presence of the crew, delicately particularized"; that seems to me going too far. Nevertheless, Wajda and Sulik, while including most of the specific references to individual sailors, have managed to minimize the collective contribution of the crew, perhaps in order to make the achievement of Captain Korzeniowski loom the larger.

Let me cite only one last significant departure from the original. In the text, we read: "By the exorcising virtue of Mr. Burns's awful laugh, the malicious spectre had been laid, the evil spell broken, the curse removed. We were now in the hands of a kind and energetic Providence. It was rushing us on . . . " Leaving aside the not unpiquant question of how this passage jibes with Conrad's subsequent rather too shrill assertions that the story had nothing to do with the supernatural, let us consider how the film treats this passage—by having the captain exclaim in direct discourse: "Your laughter has done it! The forces of nature can change sides!" Whatever Conrad's intentions may have been here, such crude didacticism is their surest betrayal.

Notwithstanding all this, the film has some modest virtues. There are, for instance, moments when the ship and its reflection in the water become a gamut of brown tones, which produces a surprising, sobering impact on an eye that expects a spectrum of blues and greens. There is the good effect to which the sick Burns's open cabin door (as specified by the text) is put: it enables Wajda, by leaving the captain's door similarly open, to shoot some of the two men's conversations in chill, alternating long shots from cabin to cabin. And there are two nice supporting performances by Graham Lines as Burns and Tom Wilkinson as Ransome, though here, again, the sense of the almost spooky efficiency, versatility and ubiquity of Ransome, the ministering angel with the deathly sick heart, has been missed. This deprives us of the shock of his demissioning

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immediately upon reaching port, of his sad but fierce giving up, which may somehow relate, if only as an antithesis, to the hero's quitting his own earlier post.

As I reflect on this unhappy adaptation, I am forcibly reminded of an old joke about two Jewish immigrants from Poland meeting on a New York street. "What are you doing these days?" asks one. "I am polishing my English," says the other. "Better," says the first, "you should be Englishing your Polish." As a joke, it may not be much, but it does rather come into its own as a critique of Sulik and Wajda.

Notes on Contributors

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CHARLES W. MILLARD

Baziotes and Rothko

THE HISTORY OF WESTERN PAINTING since the Renaissance is punctuated with artists whose work is less noticed than that of their fellows despite clear evidence of superior talent and accomplishment. This seems sometimes to happen when that work is of extreme compositional or coloristic reticence—quiet painting at odds with the prevailing style of its period (the LeNains, Chardin). At other times, it is the product of pictures that are, at least on one level, so accessible that their basic quality can be ignored (Corot) or that they can too easily be seen as merely decorative (Avery). Conversely, work that is unusually difficult of access can produce the same result. Two recent painters who have suffered from this situation, in different ways and for somewhat different reasons, are William Baziotes and Mark Rothko.[1]

The earliest generally known pictures by Baziotes, for whom the 1930s were essentially student years, date from around 1940. Two of these—*Untitled (Clown with Apple)* and *Woman and Pink Snake*—are characteristic of him and suggest some of his future concerns. In both, forms largely contained within the composition are heavily outlined in black, resulting in areas of local color and evidencing the artist's interest in drawing. The color in these pictures, both that of the grounds and that of the forms described, is modulated throughout rather than applied flat, and is unsubtle. Baziotes himself seems to have been aware of the resultant heaviness, for the thick black outlining is relieved by thinner lines of white painted on top of it. This extreme tonal contrast reinforces the disjunctive quality of both compositions, typical of a young and searching sensibility. The two pictures in question clearly stand for different directions in Baziotes' art, the jagged and expressive patterns of the *Clown* indicating a debt to Picasso, while the softer, rounded outlines of the *Woman*, and its less strident color scheme, project quite another sensibility. It is perhaps indicative that the *Woman* is the more satisfying composition and, particularly in light of Baziotes' future development, one suspects that the *Clown* represents what the painter thought he should be doing to make a major statement, while the *Woman* stands for something more personal on which a solider, if less immediately spectacular, accomplished could be based.

By 1942 Baziotes' work reflected his flirtation with Surrealism, a flirta-

[1] These reflections were inspired by three exhibitions: "Early Abstract Expressionism: The Formative Years," originated by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University and the Whitney Museum, New York; "William Baziotes: A Retrospective Exhibition," originated by the Newport Harbor Art Museum; and "Mark Pothko, 1903–1970: A Retrospective," originated by The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Although it may seem anomalous to treat Rothko as a neglected painter, I feel that his work is still too little seen and understood, despite the publicity it has received in recent years. Indeed, that publicity seems to have obscured the real issues in Rothko's painting while making his name widely known.

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tion that worked to the long range benefit of his art by confirming the poetic side of his nature. The immediate visual results were not so happy, however, and pictures like *The Butterflies of Leonardo da Vinci* and *Accordion of Flesh* rely too heavily on vulgar devices derived from Ernst and Matta, respectively. Nevertheless, since the smoldering color of the latter work depends on juxtapositions and overlays of closely related hues and values meant to evoke atmospheric rather than substantial effects, it had to be achieved by a thinning of the paint, and to that extent the picture represents a step forward. Moreover, the suggestive, dream-like nature of both paintings demanded a loosening of linear structure so that forms were less clearly defined. Baziotes accomplished this in part by widening his lines into broad, dark-toned washes and in part by thinning them to pencil-like threads that pattern the surface. The result is a cohesiveness, and tendency toward all-overness and larger scale, that was important for the future. If the quality of these pictures of the early '40s is not all that might be desired, they—in particular *Accordion of Flesh*—embody important technical advances that were of material assistance in Baziotes' maturation as a painter.

During 1944 and 1945 Baziotes' painting congealed again, with brushstrokes becoming more obvious and linear patterning, evidenced in a kind of compartmentalization, more important as an overall ordering device. In general, these pictures recall the peripheral Cubism of Torres-Garcia and of pictographs, particularly those of Gottlieb, and in them Baziotes seems to have been trying to come to grips with early Abstract-Expressionism, as he had earlier done with Picasso and Surrealism. This is particularly evident in a picture such as *The Wine Glass* of 1944 with its drips and generally loose facture. *Still Life* of 1945 stands in much the same synthetic relationship to the work of these years as *Accordion of Flesh* does to that of the previous period. While its color and linear structure are still heavy to the point of being overbearing, the composition is unified and enlarged in scale by the suppression of horizontal lines in favor of a complex series of interlocking vertical forms. The resulting all-overness pulls the entire composition toward the picture plane, denying pictorial space, a process assisted by the intensity of some of the colors. Among those colors one begins to notice the turquoise that was to become characteristic of Baziotes' mid-career.

While it was to be some time before Baziotes' mature style would triumph definitively, it first announced itself clearly in 1946, a year in which one senses a great many contradictions and cross-currents in the artist's work. *The Web* of that year shows the richness of his still assertive color sense, evidenced in the preference for shades such as emeralds, turquoises, purples, and off-blues that was to continue for some time. This coloristic richness is due in part to the juxtaposition of related hues and to their placement on top of one another made possible by broad, open brushwork. The consequent visual opulence is relieved by touches of contrasting color and by a spare linear pattern drawn on the surface of the composition, as well as by the fact that the color moves with some independence behind that pattern. Thus, the colored horizontal lines at

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the left are used to tie the color areas behind them together, while the black outline defines an open, animal-related shape that dominates the composition (the shapes that appear in Baziotes' work of the late '40s and early '50s, whether linear or produced by color areas, are mostly animistic). The danger for pictures like this is visual overload produced by richness of color and active brushwork, an overload than even delicate linear patterning cannot obviate. This problem is aggravated whenever the color becomes dense or uninflected, as in *Circus Abstraction,* or when it is too tied to drawn forms—becomes, that is, local color. Seen beside the work of many of his contemporaries—the masterful Gorky, for example, or Hofmann or de Kooning—Baziotes' painting of 1946 can look constricted, contained, small in scale, and unadventurous. If, however, one places it beside other work it closely resembles, that of Theodoros Stamos, one sees at once the strength of which it is capable, and senses Baziotes' talents as colorist, draftsman, and composer.

The later 1940s and, to a certain extent, the early 1950s were a time of consolidation for Baziotes during which he perfected his style and fought through to total reliance on his own pictorial sensibility. Occasionally, he seems to have felt the need to produce an "important" picture, such as *The Mirror* of 1948, with its contrasts of color and tone, its generally dark value structure, and its darkening of forms toward their edges—shading—to give them bulk. Something about the work suggests painters like Tamayo, indicating that Baziotes had not yet entirely freed himself from the opinion of the world and what it valued. Even here, however, one sees the simplification of the few foreground elements—in this case humanoid—placed against a background divided into clearly defined areas that typifies Baziotes' work of the time, suggesting his interest in spareness and ever larger scale. Somewhat closer to his native sensibility is *Masquerade Still Life* (1947), a picture similar in conception to *The Mirror* but lighter in tonality, developed through a range of blues and greens rather than reds and browns, and freer in its drawing. In it, Baziotes turns local color to his advantage by softening his hues, continuing to apply them one over the other in increasingly atmospheric effects, thereby tying them together. The three vertical shapes seen against a horizontally divided tripartite ground are wholly separated from one another, unlike those in *The Mirror,* and linear patterns are used to enliven the surface of the picture as well as to define shapes.

Gradually, Baziotes worked toward thinner and softer effects, using "prettier" colors and abandoning his earlier tendency to make his application look impastoed and frenetic. The results are unaggressive pictures of great visual reticence. In doing this, he was directly opposing the tendencies of the painting of his time, but what he lost in the accessibility of his pictures to a public accustomed to other things he must more than have gained back in the realization of his own deepest nature. By the early 1950s, a few large forms were floated against unified grounds applied with a small, even touch to produce dappled effects, a result anticipated by *Pierrot* of 1947. In *Phantasm* (1951) a curtain of thin, tentacular lines is hung from the upper right edge of the composition, presaging the

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mere hints of lines with which Baziotes inflected his later pictures and which he seems to have derived from Miro's more lyrical moments. The dissolution of the background into a unified color atmosphere is here complete, and the nature and richness of the color harmonies recall Bonnard in their intensity. They are bearable in *Phantasm* because they carry almost the entire burden of the pictorial structure. *The Flesh Eaters* (1952) is the summary picture of these years, and in it one sees a tendency both for the foreground shapes to become generally organic, as opposed to specifically humanoid or animistic, and for the thin black contours around them to disappear. These tendencies exemplify, respectively, the increasing purity of Baziotes' abstraction and his growing reliance on color freed from shape to carry his pictorial burden.

From the mid 1950s until his death in 1963 Baziotes was in command of a mature artistic instrument. Freely conceived forms are floated against vaporous grounds, the effect being less of shapes seen against a background than of amorphous objects floating in an aqueous medium. Although there is great depth in these works, there is little distance, and the horizontal divisions that not infrequently characterize them are less horizons than changes of density, further emphasizing their aquatic nature and suppressing traditional landscape and figural associations. They tend to be uniformly light-valued, the color that suffuses their mottled surfaces apparent less as hue than as atmospheric richness, and a graying of the tones makes one seem to see them as through a scrim. Baziotes' final triumphs of disembodiment are *Serpentine* of 1961 and *Dawn* of 1962. In both, the ribbon-like shapes that emerge from the closely-inflected ground and the hair-like lines that flank them are organized anti-naturalistically, that is, they writhe weightlessly from upper left to lower right, obliterating gravitational references. In *Serpentine,* what seems to be a colorless composition is built up of the slightest touches of subtle pink and blue. In *Dawn,* the figure and the ground are intimately locked together by interpenetrating one another. In both, Baziotes brings his quiet painting to a pitch of perfection that declares him to be among the finest artists of his time. The fact that he could do so when major painting seemed located at such a vast remove from his own art evidences the courageous honesty of his artistic sensibility. The fact that other times and styles have now made it possible for us to see and understand his work is vindication of that honesty.

Although Rothko shares with Baziotes a sensibility apart from those of other painters of his time, and a consequent coolness on the part of his potential audience, the two differ vastly in the nature of their sensibilities and in the nature of the relatively neglected art to which those sensibilities gave rise. The lyrical reticence of Baziotes' painting naturally placed it temporarily in the shadow of such more visually vigorous work as that of Pollock and the Abstract Expressionists. Rothko's painting, on the other hand, while profoundly introspective and apparently of great simplicity, could be both massive in scale and brilliant in color—hence, relatively assertive in its own right—and its inaccessibility stems from the uncompromising way in which it projects the intellectual power that lies

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behind it. If some artists clothe their intellectual attainments in an envelope of what can only be described as great beauty, as Matisse did, others, like Cézanne, choose to let those attainments stand out in unadorned severity. Rothko is one of the latter type. The works of such men are so rarefied, their visual statements so pure and so powerful, that they defy not only understanding in the usual sense (and, hence, "appreciation") but verbalization of any kind. If Baziotes is an artist who stood apart from his fellows, Rothko is one who, in at least one important sense, passed beyond them.

Rothko matured more slowly than Baziotes and by means of a more complex, if more single-minded, process. Early landscape watercolors of the late 1920s show him attracted to the work of John Marin, then a leader of the avant-garde in the United States. By the early 1930s he was painting largely unremarkable figure compositions, heavily impastoed or brushy and worked out principally in dark tonalities. These seem occasionally to refer to the neo-Classical or Surrealist Picasso, and culminate in the 1936 *Self-Portrait.* A work of particular strength, the *Self-Portrait* is developed in a dark range of browns and reds, with coloristic relief in the blue of the glasses and tonal relief in the highlights of the face and the white of the shirtfront. The figure dominates the composition even more than in other works of the time, and a particular unity is given by the coherence of the color and the fluidity of the brushwork, uninterrupted by drawn contour. Between 1936 and 1938 Rothko lightened his palette and thinned his application, distorting his figures in ways reminiscent of Milton Avery. He experimented more widely with color, both close-valued and contrasting in tone, and both saturated and mixed in hue. While his favored format during this time was horizontal, his compositions were often made up of successions of vertical elements, not infrequently immensely elongated human figures juxtaposed in vaguely Surreal ways. Noticeable throughout these and future developments is how thoroughly Rothko's paintings are his own, despite his clear awareness of what went on around him, and how completely he transformed whatever he took from other art before he made use of it. *Subway Scene* of 1938 is particularly adventurous coloristically and especially rigorous in its geometrical organization. Space is severely flattened, partly by the raking of the floor and partly by the large, geometrical, relatively uninflected color areas, although the open stairway railings do permit some depth.

From 1938 through the early 1940s Rothko developed in various directions with extraordinary speed and purposiveness. During the first two years of this period there appear compositions, horizontal in format, which are developed in three horizontal zones. The uppermost of these zones is frequently composed of a row of Classicising heads, full-face and profile, bled into one another. The bottom zone may contain feet or legs, while the middle zone, separated from that beneath it in an early work by what looks like a bench, seems to contain backs and buttocks. These quickly evolve in later works into abstract patterns. As these works develop, the elements within them tend to detach themselves from one another and to become more abstract, although animistic forms appear with

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some regularity. In general, a flavor of Magic Realism hovers over Rothko's pictures of around 1940.

Until about 1945 Rothko used two distinct formats for his work, one horizontal, often with a tripartite ground against which cursive forms are arranged, the other vertical, usually developing vertical forms—surrogate figures—against relatively unified grounds. The forms in both are apt to be fragmentary and disembodied. During 1944 and 1945 he brought this style to a particular pitch of perfection. In *Tiresias,* of the former year, his increasing coloristic complexity is clearly apparent in the atmospheric shading of colors and tones into one another, an effect enhanced by considerable dry-brushing which allows colors to show through from beneath. The forms described also dissolve into one another, and in general the devices of the painting are so subtle and so fugitive as to defy description. *Slow Swirl by the Edge of the Sea,* also of 1944, is the major statement of this style, with vertical forms played off against a horizontal ground in a squarish horizontal format. The fact that the forms open into the ground locks the two together in a particularly intimate relationship. Line and color lead complementary but independent lives in this work, which also shows how masterful a colorist Rothko had become. One senses an awareness of Gorky in the biomorphic forms and in such touches as the juxtaposition of a shaded red and blue at the right center, while other works of the period suggest that Max Ernst may have been of some use to him. By 1945, in part because of Rothko's vast repertory of formal and coloristic devices and the appearance of the larger scale that one expects in the work of masters as they approach their maturity, it was apparent that Rothko was, and was to be, a major painter.

In 1946 Rothko took a major step toward the style for which he is now best known by banishing drawing from his canvases, a move that may owe something to the work of Clyfford Still. He seems to have been further encouraged toward breadth and openness by his monochrome explorations of 1945-46, many of them in watercolor, which gave him greater freedom than oil, although by 1947 color had returned, more dominant and more brilliant than before. The texture given by dry brushing was also discarded, and Rothko's compositions became aggregations of soft-edged color areas, some irregular, some roughly geometric. These might be arranged horizontally or vertically, or, occasionally, in interlocking all-over patterns. They evidence an extraordinary complexity of form and astonishing juxtapositions of color—pink, light blue, and ochre, for example. By 1948 the color areas became fewer and larger, and the "classical" Rothko was clearly emerging. *Number 18* (1948-49) is a typical and particularly good example of the type. The large area dominating the top of the composition forecasts the two or three such areas that were soon to become standard, while the color—bright red against orange, grayed blue and green, and mustard—has a particular subtlety and intensity. The format of two or more rectangular color areas filling a squarish vertical canvas almost to its edges was established by late 1949, and for the remainder of his life Rothko explored and refined this type. Clearly, the number, size, and shape of the color areas, in relation to the hues used, were mat-

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ters of crucial importance, as were the distances between the areas themselves and between them and the edges of the canvas. Generally speaking, it is not to a picture's advantage to have one of its areas close in hue and value to the ground unless all the areas are so related. Areas that are too hard edged tend to be static, impeding the interlocking of color possible with soft-edged areas, and opaque color areas often go dead. For all their iconic simplicity, the best of Rothko's mature pictures are informed with a subtle and complex pictorial sensibility. Color, at once atmospheric and substantial, is given maximum freedom to speak at either high or low intensity. At their best, and Rothko's rate of success was high, these are pictures of tremendous presence that make no concessions to the viewer. There is no easy way to approach them, no convenient handle to grab, and they demand intense, contemplative concentration. This is particularly true of the very late pictures, beginning around 1960, in which Rothko darkens his color, turning from bright reds, blues, yellows and oranges toward deep tones of the same hues or rich browns and purples. At the very end, in 1969, there appear a series of large acrylics on paper worked out entirely in earthy monochromes divided into two clearly defined zones. These are, unhappily, too static to be successful, reminding one by contrast how much movement is involved in Rothko's art. Not movement of forms nor flickering optical movement, but a sort of breathing, an inner, vital movement that keeps the eye searching and finding across the changing surface of the canvas. Given the rarefied and abstract terms in which Rothko's art is ultimately couched, it is no wonder that his audience has up to now been a small one. Although the passage of time will remedy that to some extent, his art will probably never be widely popular and he, like Baziotes, will always be seen to stand apart from his time anticipating the future.

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Reviews

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Criticisms of Life: Sound and Half-Sound

HEAR MATTHEW ARNOLD ONCE MORE on "The Study of Poetry":

> For in poetry the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance. . . . In poetry, as a criticism of life . . . the spirit of our race will find, we have said, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay. But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true.

Round and round he goes, tiring our patience, annoying us by brandishing his touchstones—his Homer, his Dante, his Shakespeare, his Milton—compared to which the modern poem will fall into its proper place. He is intolerable, arrogant, doesn't know that poetry isn't religion, hasn't read Barthes or Barthelme, or even T. S. Eliot. (Of Arnold's phrase about a poet's greatness consisting in his "powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life," Eliot remarked disparagingly—"as if ideas were a lotion for the inflamed skin of suffering humanity.") Yet each year as time goes on and other helps fail, and as fewer contemporary poems sound truly to me, Arnold's insistence that poetry be a criticism of life is the more inescapable. My particular problem with the slim (and not so slim) volumes of this quarter, is that along with them I've encountered a masterpiece I'd not before realized was such: Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin,* in Charles Johnston's brilliant new translation. But rather than come down from its heights to the more modest reaches of some contemporaries, let us begin with two expertly managed first volumes and two others by poets under forty.[1]

The Princeton Series of Contemporary Poets has a high batting average indeed. Of the six volumes listed on the jacket I have read three—by Robert Pinsky, James Richardson and Ben Belitt—and found much to praise in each. Now comes Gary Miranda who composes with wit and delicacy, moving into a poem with attractive ease:

> Some people would remember iron
> railings, the color of buildings,

[1] LISTENERS AT THE BREATHING PLACE, by *Gary Miranda.* Princeton University Press. $7.50; $2.95 paperback. BADDECK AND OTHER POEMS, by *Anne Hussey.* Wesleyan University Press. $7.50; $3.45 paperback. A CIRCUS OF NEEDS, by *Stephen Dunn.* Carnegie-Mellon University Press. $8.95; $3.95 paperback. RIVERSONGS, by *Michael Anania.* University of Illinois Press. $7.95; $3.95 paperback.

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how a dog circled three times
before settling in—novelists,
certainly, or just good talkers.

Most of us merely "flash into knowledge," then lose the feel of "this face, that window"—and what happens then?

Such loss, if lived with, stiffens
into pain; it stands up, starched
and handsome, ready to please the neighbors.
We find ourselves forgetting dreams, whole
days, the last time we were honest;

we ask ourselves: say something
in childhood, and feel only the weight
of what that means brush against
our face like snow. "Like snow,"
we say, not even coming close.

"Like Snow" is a poem about memory and metaphor which makes its point with tactful grace, a grace that is often felt in Miranda's openings, as in "Ars Poetica":

Ambiance, feckless, ineluctable:
sometimes you think it would all be clear
if you merely increased your vocabulary,
learning words that line up possibilities
like birds on a wire, or clothespins.

But it turns out that somehow they have to come to you; neither words nor possibilities can be lined up to make a poem.

Miranda's work is usually sound because its rhythms are so. He works nicely with the small stanza but on occasion can open up into a powerful rhetoric where one thing really does lead to another, the poem gathering itself together cumulatively, as in this passage from the third section of "Second-Born Son"—a poem dedicated to the dangerous presence of Walt Whitman:

Which self was it, Walt, that called you
to the window that dusk as your father
lay dying, your only older brother going mad,
your youngest brother crippled and half-witted,
your mother knitting her yarn of helplessness
around you all tighter and tighter—to that window
where you saw prefigured in clouds off Long Island
your own face and heard the late mockingbird
speak your name in the elms? I see you there
tentative as the first stars, turning not bright

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but transparent as glass through which you wander
into the evening to become the lover of lonely
housewives, the begetter of invisible children,
sounder of depths, food for the hungry
who do not know they are hungry . . .

The sentence winds breathlessly on, at length completing itself, then coming to its close in a fine settling gesture:

And in the manuscript
the long dusty avenues of your lines rise
weightlessly from the page and wind off toward
some zero of expectation, high over Paumanok.

I would expect more good things from this talented writer.

Anne Hussey's first book reveals an almost excessively occasional poet, on the ready to grab anything and make a poem out of it. She's very much a verbalist, never misses anything that may be squeezed out of the words, and sometimes—in the language of Miranda's poem—those words seem to be lined up a bit too much like birds on a wire, or clothespins. Always clever and bright, her verse has the accent of Harvard Square about it (not a bad thing, there are worse places) but when a poem begins like this—

You brought the bread and cheese
and a new translation of Neruda. I
brought 6-12 mosquito repellent, an old blanket
to sit on, and a bottle of red wine
without a corkscrew.

—I found myself wincing a bit. There is also some Anne Sexton declarative writing, with the "I" very much front and center. I liked best the title poem ("Baddeck" is a place in Nova Scotia) and think that Anne Hussey could afford to let her lines see where they'll take her, as they begin to do in this part of that poem:

I picture these lakes in 1909, frozen over,
and Alexander Graham Bell, bundled in rugs
on a sleigh, his nose running and his
eyes watering with cold, as he supervised
the test of his newest biplane.
Hauling it over the gray ice, the horses,
their winter coats heavy with frozen sweat
and breath, struggled like medieval horses,
until the contraption, with its rear fan
shaped like a giant monstrance,
picked up speed
and skimmed over the ice on runners,

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swinging on its guy lines the furiously skating,
bearded townsmen who attended it.

If her vice is an occasional archness ("Adam was lazing in his hammock sipping manischewitz"), it is wholly absent from "Baddeck," where she has been carried into true speech, less fancy than imaginative. Like Gary Miranda she is someone to keep track of.

At times one can't suppress the thought that though we all know what a supremely difficult task writing poetry is cracked up to be, it often looks as if a contemporary poem has got written too easily. This is Stephen Dunn's third book of them in five years, and since he never rhymes, writes lines of varying length, doesn't worry much about stanzas even when he sort of uses them, and as far as I can hear isn't committed to producing very distinctive rhythms in individual lines—a lot of poems is the likely result. I treated them casually, browsed here and there, and occasionally came up with something interesting, as in "Weatherman" which begins this way:

Tonight I've decided to tell you, friends,
how much bad weather excites me.
I love the way it moves
state to state, and though I seem to rejoice
when it blows out to sea, that's just showbiz.
I'd like it to perch off the Carolinas
or double back across the nation,
and I know some of you feel the same.
Something in me responds to a low
and I'm sorry, I can watch the footage
from tornado damage all evening.

It goes on in this relatively amusing and relaxed way. But generally I think Dunn might try unrelaxing, shape his poems a bit more strenuously and see then whether individual ones might become more individually memorable.

A somewhat similar difficulty presented itself in Michael Anania's second book which Laurence Lieberman on the dust jacket finds an "amazing advance" over his "splendid" first one. Lieberman particularly admires, in the sequence of river poems with Lewis and Clark in the background ("The Riversongs of Arion") the way Anania "blends historical materials with the charm of personal witnessing." It was just that personal charm which I missed in these poems and in the others from the volume. Anania's voice is so even and toneless throughout that his rhythms have to do all the work (there are few surprising or fanciful statements). I don't find that they do quite enough, in the beginning of "Reeving" for example:

Tricks of the weather
or slights of memory,
another Sunday empty

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of touch, so clear
this January seems like May.

Impositions of dead fathers,
their remaining tyrannies—
the Dutch-German I never knew
panning for gold or harrowing
South Dakota into dust, quick
flashes of amethyst across
the blackened winepress

Anania, like his poems and like the river that haunts them, is always on the move, discovering America I guess. He is a trifle too protean for my tastes, yet is always intelligent and quite clear about what he wants to do. Another reader might (obviously in Lieberman's case has) respond differently, with more delight.

The next four poets have in one way or another the advantage of humor, which seems to me an excellent advantage for poets to have and definitely an asset to their criticism of life.[2] Given his affiliations with the New York art critics crowd (is it a crowd? or a community?) I found myself liking Peter Schjedahl more than I'd expected to. He shows New York School manners, addressing himself with exclamatory good will ("Oh, keep it up Peter! you're going to make us/all so much happier"), begins "Good Morning" with "What's good about it?", drops names and calls names ("Lucy R. Lippard of the portable moral authority;/ Hilton Kramer the abhorrent, who makes art sound as appealing as a deodorant enema; nice-making John Russell,") and is eager to find out from readers "How do you like this poem so far." Ever since reading Kenneth Koch's "The Strangler," I have understood that you can get away with saying anything in a poem so long as it's funny enough. Schjedahl is only occasionally so, but always bubbling and musing. And in the book's first poem—"Suburbs Circa 1946–'50"—he does more than that. "Suburbs" begins with the postwar boom:

Young couples, husbands and wives living
hand to mouth, but optimistic
about the suburbs, "swell place for kids"
which (kids) they were having by the thousands—
who knew about birth control?
except maybe rubbers, but with one's *wife?*

He tells us that "It practically rained babies,/each seen to resemble Win-

[2] SINCE 1964: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS, by *Peter Schjedahl.* Sun. $3.50 paperback. ROUNDING THE HORN, by *David R. Slavitt.* Louisiana State University Press. $3.95 paperback. LUCILLE, Summer 1978 Special Issue: The Poetry of *Thomas Whitbread.* Lucille Press. $3.00. COLLECTED VERSE, by *John Manifold.* University of Queensland Press. $12.00; $6.00 paperback.

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ston Churchill." The women were unorgasmic and inarticulate, while the men

> . . . in their mid-20's, with a fresh gloss
> on G.I.-Bill education, who'd been to war, gone overseas
> and beaten the Axis, saving the world—scared shitless
> the entire time, their memories now largely shameful,
> unconfessible (to whom to confess?)—filled with a vague rage
> now unravelling in the suburbs' blessed monotony.

What, he asks, had they learned? What did they now understand?

> Nothing! They had learned and understood nothing,
> pushovers-to-be for Dulles and McCarthy, pushovers for Sinatra.
> Think of the suburbs and doting on Sinatra
> in the suburbs, inclining toward console radios in houses
> where plaster was still chalky, exuding a dank smell,
> and lawn turned to mire where it rained
> and new sewer systems were unreliable, and everything
> was new but felt ancient . . .

And it goes on. Whether or not it's all true, some of it must be, and at any rate Schjedahl believes it with such enthusiasm, invents with such authority and sureness, that I, though also a pushover for Sinatra, had to go along. As for the babies from that time, the final line of the poem tells us—"When they grew up there would be hell to pay." Say around 1968? I found "Suburbs" original, even moving, and Peter Schjedahl generally worth listening to.

My acquaintance with the work of David Slavitt is insufficient, though I remember years ago trying his first novel (*Rochelle*) and have read occasional poems and reviews by him. Now I find that he has authored seven books of poetry and translation, eight novels, and six "Pseudonymous novels" (I always meant to look at *The Exhibitionist,* by "Henry Sutton"). Figuring anyone who wrote this much couldn't be taken seriously I was surprised to discover that *Rounding the Horn* is a thoroughly satisfactory book, always alive in its language, sometimes poignant and touching. The poet Slavitt most resembles is perhaps Howard Nemerov, in his commitment to rhyme and stanza and to an ironic-suburban perspective on things. But even Nemerov has not so far as I know celebrated the xylophone player in verse:

> The clown is supposed to be sad, but what about
> the xylophone player
> who has more reason, must come, sooner or later,
> to realize how wanting
> in culture or common sense his parents were
> (or, worse, her parents
> were) to permit, to purchase so absurd,

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so vulgar an instrument,
and who, moreover, must have had to practice,
for unlike the clown,
the xylophone player does not try to be funny,
but alone in her
(yes, it has to be her) room plinky-plonks
through long afternoons
with a wooden zest only a moron or lunatic
would be likely to feel . . .

Her name, I believe, was Phyllis Martin and she was a fellow member of the Johnson City High School Band. (Or am I mixing her up with Mary Jane Tucker who blurted out the offbeats on a mellophone loaned her by the school?) Anyway, "Air for Xylophone," which eventually comes round to a nice appreciation of the endeavour, won me to Slavitt; as did "Reunion Elegiacs," addressed to his Yalie mates. But most admirable of all is a sonnet called "Soap Opera" which has given me the final justification for my daily half-hour with "Search for Tomorrow":

They wade through sorrows scriptwriters devise
in kitchens, hospital rooms, divorce courts, jails,
or cemeteries, and nearly everyone tries
to do the right thing. And everyone fails.

Their happiness is only a setup for woe.
Fridays are always bad—although the mood
is seldom brighter than desperate—and they go
staggering on to Monday's vicissitude.

Stupid, I used to think, and partly still
do, deploring the style, the mawkishness.
And yet, I watch. I cannot get my fill
of lives as dumb as mine: Pine Valley's mess
is comforting. I need not wish them ill.
I watch, and I delight in, their distress.

What *would* Matthew Arnold have thought had he read "Soap Opera"? No need to worry: it seems to me a little masterpiece, as sound in its morals and psychology as in its excellent rhythms and syntax. Read it aloud and see for yourself. David Slavitt may be too professional to be a Deep Artist (I feel the accusation "slick" looming somewhere on the horizon) but I wouldn't have him do a thing different, and he should be proud of *Rounding the Horn.*

One shouldn't review books to which one has written an introductory comment, but since it's not exactly a book perhaps I may be excused for calling attention to the Summer 1978 issue of *Lucille,* a poetry journal published in Austin, Texas, and containing in this issue a generous selection of Thomas Whitbread's poetry. In 1961 Whitbread published an im-

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pressive first book of poems (*Four Infinitives,* Harper) after which for reasons I don't at all understand there have been no further volumes, though he has continued to write and publish (I'm willing to blame Harper for not supporting him more strongly). At any rate, *Lucille* contains most of this book, and also a liberal selection from a new one to be published sometime this year in A. Poulin's *BOA* editions. Whitbread is the poet of ordinary American life, of trains and roads and games; also the poet of lost childhood, lost friends and lovers, all the lost world that in recent years only Randall Jarrell has written better about. Like David Slavitt, Whitbread is an expert rhymester and stanza-man, and these set off his wit to good advantage in "Bede":

> When the old thanes got drunk on sunny mead
> And saw the swallow fly through the mead hall,
> Did they send at once for the Venerable Bede,
> Or was he there, imbibing bird and all?
>
> He may have been the first offhand reporter,
> Like many today, who rely for information
> On dubious source, wire service, canned distorter,
> Or he may have been someone used to distillation.
>
> He was used to the Word of God. What word can be
> More distilled, compacter, than "Let there be Light"?
> Even if the bird flew when he couldn't see,
> Mead to lips, eyes closed? or not there? Bede's mind shone bright
>
> And said its quick flight, in and out, was the life of man.
> However he got it, punditry began.

A poem like this could have been written by one or two others, of the caliber of Wilbur or Nemerov or X. J. Kennedy, say. But there is much in Whitbread's poetry that nobody but he could have written. I don't see how anyone can not admire "Bede"; but his more personal utterances are bound to strike some tastes as indulgent, not sufficiently "mature." I won't say that's their problem, but will quote as an example a poem about which opinions might differ titled "The Best Place to Read Carlyle":

> Where's the best place to read Carlyle? I'll tell you!
> It's on a plank dock on Lake Webb in Maine,
> Near Weld. You sit there in your trunks, in sun,
> Reading Thomas in a 1700-thin-page
> Anthology by Oxford, and when anything
> Strikes you, you pencil in the margin, "Crux."
> When bored, you dive into the lake. You surface
> At the float, and lie on it. Sometimes you row
> A boat a ways to a brook and silently

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Flow up it in the hope of seeing beaver.
Before dinner, rye with ice chipped by a pick
From a 100-lb. block in a chest
That serves to keep food cold: Maryland rye,
Sipped in between bites of raw carrots. After,
Reading of other things by oil-lamp, or
Cards, or Double-Crostics. Often, talk.
Your host knows when to tell an anecdote.
Early to bed, not too late to rise, straight razor
For shaving in lake water. Near the end
Of every afternoon, a two-mile walk.
That is the only place to read Carlyle.

If this is the sort of thing you like, as I do, then you may want to write for a copy of the issue, if copies are still available. The address is *Lucille*, 5 Kern Ramble, Austin, Texas 78722. Or be on the lookout for Whitbread's forthcoming volume, *Whomp and Moonshiver.*

Verse satire isn't much practiced these days, and for good reason, since it's been done better in better days. But in the collected poems of an Australian poet in his seventies, John Manifold, I found a splendid series of lines paying tribute to a leading literary figure of our time, which are good enough to share:

Here simple Spender in a place apart
Bares on his sleeve his haemophilic heart;
Dribble by drip the pinkish flow proceeds—
Oh, squeeze it, Mister Spender! Thar she bleeds!
Long since, a Sweet Young Thing, he staked his claim,
His vein a gusher proved, he rose to fame
Postured in public with a nudist's smile,
Outbled a pig, outwept a crocodile; . . .
Now in degenerate prose, not verse alone,
He rapes (as formerly he bayed) the moon;
Now, as a critic, shows for all to see
Shelley and Whitman were the same as he.
The passing years brought little change of plan—
The Sweet Young Thing became a Grand Old Man.
But as boloney, slice it where you will,
Remains boloney, pure boloney still,
So he continues and his constant theme
Is this unpleasant moist and sticky stream.

from "A Hat in the Ring"

As Horace would agree, it is difficult not to write satire, especially as the subject of this one continues his dazzling career on the lecture circuits of American colleges and universities.

Muriel Rukeyser is on her way to becoming the Grand Old Woman of American poetry, at least so I gather from the rapturous reviews of this

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heavy collection of her twelve books.[3] Erica Jong, perky as always, has hailed her "the mother of us all," and just in case Jong was including me in, which I doubt, I hasten to insist that Rukeyser is not my mother. In fact I had always presumed her to be one of the great bores of American poetry, to be found in Oscar Williams' anthologies along with other veteran bores like Stephen Spender, Gene Derwood, and Oscar Williams. Rukeyser, as she tells us, cares about the meeting of science and poetry. Back in the thirties her poems were filled with airplanes, subways and gyroscopes; now, in the seventies, there is lots of reverence for life, complete with deep thoughts about ultimate things (it is wrong evidently, so I find out from one poem, to despise either the clitoris or the penis) which were all too deep for a simple fellow like me:

Lying
blazing beside me
you rear beautifully and up—
your thinking face—
erotic body reaching
in all its colors and lights—
your erotic face
colored and lit—
not colored body-and-face
but now entire,
colors lights the world thinking and reaching.

from "The Speed of Darkness," 1968

Had enough? Note the spaces and figure out what to do in them. There is also mention of Auschwitz, always helpful for a poet of profundities to bring in. There is some fearless plain talk about bodily functions, and there is the sense overall that this Everywoman feels obliged to put her finger on Everything and render it significant. Not a laugh to be had in the whole 600-page carload of unsounds. Somebody once noted that Sibelius wrote wall-to-wall music; Muriel Rukeyser is surely our supreme practitioner of wall-to-wall poetry. Well, here it all is if you want it; the only problem is in the reading.

Twelve years ago as a brash young reviewer writing his first Poetry Chronicle for this magazine, I pronounced about a volume of May Swenson's that it "begins and ends in mannerism." On the basis of this well-produced collection,[4] with eighty-two pages of new poems, I'll admit that I was too knowing too quickly, and that Anthony Hecht is right to speak of her sureness of invention, Maxine Kumin to admire the "surprise" of her apt and often witty metaphors:

"The very hairs of your head
are numbered," said the words

[3] THE COLLECTED POEMS OF MURIEL RUKEYSER. McGraw-Hill. $17.50.
[4] NEW AND SELECTED THINGS TAKING PLACE, by *May Swenson.* Little, Brown and Co. $12.50.

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in my head, as the haircutter
snipped and cut, my round head
a newel poked out of the tent
top's slippery sheet, while my
hairs' straight rays rained
down, making pattern on the neat
vacant cosmos of my lap.

From "October," this is sure and surely witty. And we are always aware of the poet's presence, actively making something up, inventing a new surprise for our presumably delighted eyes and ears. Yet mannerism is still a problem. Who is to say how one should or shouldn't write about one's dead mother ("The corpse/was wrapped like *panetone* in Italian tinfoil"—R. Lowell), and are not these lines from the opening of a Swenson poem actively inventive and surprising?

My dumpy little mother on the undertaker's slab
had a mannequin's grace. From chin to foot
the sheet outlined her, thin and tall. Her face
uptilted, bloodless, smooth, had a long smile.
Her head rested on a block under her nape,
her neck was long, her hair waved, upswept. But later,
at "the viewing", sunk in the casket in pink tulle,
an expensive present that might spoil, dressed
in Eden's short apron, organdy bonnet on,
she shrank, grew short again, and yellow.

So they are, and so I also find their expertness makes me want to hold them off at a long arm's length. Nor does the poem's title, "That The Soul May Wax Plump" (her mother had prepared for her death by nearly starving herself) reconcile me, in its cleverness, to the whole enterprise.

There is an odd combination in May Swenson of the flamboyantly playful—all those typographical highjinks, the typewriter games with spaces, the poem about death which begins "Maybe there *is* a Me inside of me/and, when I lie dying, he will crawl out. Through my toe"—and a real, depressed sense of what all this our life is leading up to (see "Deaths," "Teeth," "On the Way" and others of the new poems). I wish I found the combination more attractive. Maybe the problem is that, unlike Lowell, she isn't able to create herself in a vivid, humorous, agonized way; instead she comes across as modest, unhysterical, often fanciful, but maybe not quite there in the most important way. Anyway the best of these poems are about travel, nature, camping, the land observed: "Camping in Madera Canyon," "The North Rim," "Bison Crossing Near Mt. Rushmore" and others. Very professional stuff always, but somehow it doesn't touch my heart.

Like Muriel Rukeyser, Denise Levertov writes too many poems, too many journal jottings broken up into lines, a title plunked on top of them

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with the hope that some rhythm of composition according to "the musical phrase" (Pound) will hold them together. But in the best poems from this book,[5] and they are found in its first section titled "Homage to Cesare Pavese," she works with longer lines and a discursive structure, yet avoids the breathless heart-on-sleeve manner that for me marred so much of her last three, politically obsessed volumes. In fact the sequence of poems about a daughter and her ninety-year old mother dying in Mexico, is as moving and intelligent work as anything she has done since "Olga Poems" (written about her sister) from *The Sorrow Dance* (1967). It is difficult to quote usefully from poems as extended and continuous as these, but the following may suggest the quality of Levertov's voice and pace. In "A Daughter (1)," speaking of the daughter she says that

> . . . —her one happiness *this* time
> was to water her mother's treasured, fenced-in garden,
> a Welsh oasis where she remembers adobe rubble
> two decades ago. Will her mother now
> ever rise from bed, walking out of her room,
> see if her yellow rose
> has bloomed again?
> Rainbows, the dark earthfragrance, the whisper of
> arched spray:
> The pleasure goes back
> to the London garden, forty, fifty years ago,
> her mother younger than *she* is now.

The insistence feels justified, especially if you have by this time given yourself to the narrative voice as one to be respected and trusted.

The single most interesting poem, also from this section, is "Chekhov on the West Heath," which begins with a young girl pushing another young girl in a wheelchair, up Judges' Walk in Hampstead in 1941. The narrator is remembering herself as the younger girl who was pushing the wheelchair, and her voice rises to say what reading Chekhov meant for her and her friend Bet:

> . . . Who was this Chekhov
> pacing the round of the Whitestone Pond,
> his hand on the chair coming down Heath Street,
> telling the tale of Kashtanka in the gloomy sickrooms
> back at Heath Mansions?
> Ah, even though
> the dark gauze of youth
> swaddled us,
> while airraids and news of battle
> were part of each ominous day, and in flashes of dread
> we glimpsed invasion, England and Europe gone down

[5] LIFE IN THE FOREST, by *Denise Levertov.* New Directions. $8.00; $3.95 paperback.

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utterly into the nightmare;
even though Bet
was fading, month by month, and no one knew why—
we were open to life and hope; it was that he gave us,
generous, precise, lifting us
into the veins of a green leaf, translucent,
setting our hearts' tinder alight,
sun striking on glass to release
the latent flames.

And the poem continues to explore, in a manner both generous and precise, the difference that Chekhov, that growing up near the Heath with the war going on, made to their lives. In comparison to these poems, much of the later part of the book seems ephemeral and fragmentary; but no matter—Denise Levertov for stretches in these poems writes out of her deepest and best self, and you can hear it in their rhythms.

But what a pleasure it is to turn from these lyricists, solemn or witty, anguished or sardonic, to Pushkin's great poem, his novel in verse in which all moods are expressed, succeeding one another with lightning speed.[6] I write as one whose remarks about *Eugene Onegin* may be taken with some scepticism, since until a month ago I had never read it through. I have no Russian, had dipped into Nabokov's translation and commentary, but never persevered until Charles Johnston's version proved irresistible. Mr. Johnston has of course had the benefit of Nabokov's work, which his predecessor Walter Arndt (the only other translation I've looked at, published in 1963) did not. In case the reader does not have the form of the *Onegin* stanza in his head, here is Nabokov's fine description of it:

> The *EO* stanza, as a distinct form, is Pushkin's invention (May 9, 1823). It contains 118 syllables and consists of fourteen lines, in iambic tetrameter, with a regular scheme of feminine and masculine rhymes: ababeeccidiff. The abab part and the ff part are usually very conspicious in the meaning, melody, and intonation of any given stanza. The opening pattern (a clean-cut sonorous elegiac quatrain) and the terminal one (a couplet resembling the coda of an octave or that of a Shakespearean sonnet) can be compared to patterns on a painted ball or top that are visible at the beginning and at the end of the spin. The main spinning process involves eecciddi, where a fluent and variable phrasing blurs the fluent contours of the lines so that they are seldom seen as clearly consisting of two couplets and a closed quatrain.

In emphasizing Pushkin's composition as first and last a phenomenon of

[6] PUSHKIN: EUGENE ONEGIN, translated by *Charles Johnston.* Viking Press. $12.50.

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style, Nabokov also provides the following persuasive sentences about the "content" of *Eugene Onegin:*

> It is not a "picture of Russian life"; it is at best the picture of a little group of Russians, in the second decade of the last century, crossed with all the more obvious characters of western European romance and placed in a stylized Russia which would disintegrate at once if the French props were removed. . . . The paradoxical point is that the only Russian element of importance is this speech, Pushkin's language, undulating and flashing through verse melodies the likes of which had never been known before in Russia.

Compare what the stanza sounds like as translated by Nabokov, Arndt and Johnston, selecting first a more or less ordinary one (XLIV) from Chapter 4, in which Eugene whiles away the day awaiting his friend Lensky the poet, who has been invited for supper. In Nabokov's unrhymed version:

> Onegin like a regular Childe Harold
> lapsed into pensive indolence:
> right after sleep he takes a bath with ice,
> and then, at home all day,
> alone, absorbed in calculations, armed
> with a blunt cue,
> using two balls,
> ever since morn plays billiards.
> The country evening comes; abandoned
> are billiards, the cue is forgot.
> Before the fireplace the table is laid;
> Eugene waits; here comes Lenski,
> borne by a troika of roan horses;
> quick, let's have dinner!

Here is Walter Arndt:

> Childe Harold-like, Eugene subsided
> Into a state of pensive sloth:
> Straight from the drowsy bed he glided
> Into his tub through icy froth,
> Then spent all day at home with balking
> Account books, or from morning stalking
> The table, playing solo pool,
> A blunt old cue his only tool.
> The cue is shelved, billiards forgotten
> At evenfall; Onegin waits,
> While by the fire they lay the plates:
> At last here comes a troika trotting,

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Turns in; they're Lensky's iron-grays;
To table now, and no two ways!

I presume Nabokov is accurate, but any reader is likely to have problems with the rhythm—or lack of it—in his rendering. Arndt's version is perfectly readable, though I have rhythmic problems with the balking-stalking lines, don't like "balking" as an adjective, nor the movement in "stalking/The table"; also worry a bit about "solo pool" (sounds oddly American) and feel a twinge of corniness in the "no two ways!" of the final line.

Now for Charles Johnston:

Child-Harold like, Eugene's devoting
his hours to dreaming them away:
he wakes; a bath where ice is floating;
and then, indoors the livelong day,
alone, and sunk in calculation,
with a blunt cue for the duration,
from early morning on he will
at two-ball billiards prove his skill;
then, country evening fast arriving,
billiards are dropped, cue put to bed;
before the fire a table's spread;
Evgeny waits: and here comes driving,
with three roan horses in a line
Vladimir Lensky. Quick, let's dine!

To my ears Johnston manages to make more of what Nabokov calls the "spinning process" out of the eecciddi, where a "fluent and variable phrasing blurs the contours of the lines." There is perhaps a slight awkwardness in the "he will" at the end of line seven; but "billiards are dropped, cue put to bed" is swift and agile, and the final line with Lensky's name beginning it and the perfect exclamation concluding it is a triumph. Generally the Arndt translation seems a bit less variable, more regular, the lines tending more to keep their identity as individual units.

Or consider the wonderful passage in Tatyana's dream where she is pursued by a bear, as it appears in Johnston's version:

A backward look is fraught with danger;
she speeds her footsteps to a race,
but from her shaggy-liveried ranger
she can't escape at any pace—
the odious bear still grunts and lumbers.
Ahead of them a pinewood slumbers
in the full beauty of its frown;
the branches all are weighted down
with tufts of snow; and through the lifted

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summits of aspen, birch and lime,
the nightly luminaries climb.
No path to see: the snow has drifted
across each bush, across each steep,
and all the world is buried deep.

Arndt renders the bear in line five as "Still onward crashed the fiend and shuffled". Johnston's line (with a help from Nabokov) makes us see the odious fellow both through Tatyana's distress and Pushkin's detached amusement: after all, it's a dream, and Pushkin made it up.

As a final example, stanza XXXII of Chapter Six, describing Lensky dead on the ground, killed in his duel with Onegin:

He lay quite still, and strange as dreaming
was that calm brow of one who swooned.
Shot through below the chest—and streaming
the blood came smoking from the wound.
A moment earlier, inspiration
had filled his heart, and detestation
and hope and passion; life had glowed
and blood had bubbled as it flowed;
but now the mansion is forsaken;
shutters are up, and all is pale
and still within, behind the veil
of chalk the window-panes have taken.
The lady of the house has fled.
Where to, God knows. The trail is dead.

Nabokov renders the middle lines as "One moment earlier/in *this* heart inspiration,/enmity, hope, and love had throbbed,/life effervesced, blood burned;/now, as in a deserted house,/all in it is both still and dark,/it has become forever silent." Now with the feminine rhymes and enjambing of "detestation" with the next line; with the caesura always in a different place, keeping us off-balance and on the move; with the felicity of "shutters are up" and the final "The trail is dead"—Johnston has made poetry out of it. Even though he may have gone too far in having the window-panes take the "veil of chalk," we feel that Pushkin would have done it if he'd thought of it.

John Bayley's splendid chapter on *Eugene Onegin* in his *Pushkin* should be consulted for its many just and suggestive formulations (also of course the fine essays by Edmund Wilson).[7] Comparing it at one point to the typist scene from *The Waste Land,* Bayley observes that Pushkin "never disturbs the elegant balance of parody and sentiment." It is here perhaps that one would locate the sense in which the poem is a criticism of life. As

[7] John Bayley's book is *Pushkin: A Comparative Commentary* (Cambridge, 1971). Wilson's pieces on Pushkin can be found in *The Triple Thinkers* and *A Window on Russia.*

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far as I know Matthew Arnold made little of Pushkin, and might have judged him not to possess the Grand Style found in his own touchstones. To me, a beginner at Pushkin, he seems already miles ahead of Byron in subtlety and delicacy; more sympathetic and funnier than Stendhal; as good as Jane Austen, at least in this poem. And since his criticism of life is of power only in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent, I am wholly grateful to Charles Johnston for providing me with what sense of that poetry I have.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

The Sexiest Man in the World

WHILE ENGAGED ON HIS TRANSLATION of *The Tale of Genji*[1] Professor Seidensticker kept a diary from which he drew the extracts that make up *Genji Days.*[2] No doubt the Japanese firm that published it wished to honor the in-every-way-meritorious translator of their thousand-year-old national treasure, and maybe they hadn't any editors fluent enough in English to recognize that his diary levels out at zilch minus eight, being less often casual and intimate (as diaries are supposed to be) than inert and cheerless. During those years—the extracts run from 1970 to 1975—thinking about the job of translation gets set aside twice a day for thinking about such impenetrably collective matters as Vietnam, student militancy, Watergate or such sensational-sounding but disappointingly unexplicit personal matters as prowling the nocturnal Tokyo slums in search of kicks, sampling "porny movies," drinking too much, deploring "one's whole ugly fetid body," the usual diversions of a middle-aged American scholar who lives alone and doesn't like it in Tokyo, Honolulu, and Ann Arbor. There are at least three moments, though, that perforate the encircling torpor: a friend of his passes the open door of a classroom where Japanese are studying English and hears the question, "How much is your wife?"; a former U.S. Ambassador recalls riding to Haneda Airport with Vice-President Nixon, who turned to him and said, "Put on a hat. Only I go hatless"; and still another whizzing blivet (eleven pounds of shit in a ten-pound bag) from the Osric and Polonius of lit-crit, George Steiner—

> Bob Brower brought, from the *New Yorker* of January 27, a review by George Steiner of *The Master of Go.* Mr. Steiner is puzzled by the book, and says that my introduction is uninformative. As for my translation, he calls himself incompetent to judge, but says that "it does exude a condign strangeness and ceremonial deportment." Are those not nice things to exude? Bob told me that when Laura first saw it she said, "Oh my, we mustn't show Ed"; and he replied, "Oh, go ahead and show him, but don't rub it in."

Of course *Genji Days* also has things to say about *Genji,* and this part of the book is sparer and more professional, notably praiseworthy for not trying to paper over the translator's changes of opinion about one or another character or episode when, putting it into English, he decides it's

[1] THE TALE OF GENJI, by *Murasaki Shikibu.* Translated with an Introduction by *Edward G. Seidensticker.* Knopf. $25.00; $10.00 paperback.

[2] GENJI DAYS, by *Edward G. Seidensticker.* Kodansha International Ltd., Tokyo. $15.00.

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worse or better than he had thought: "I have never much liked the Tamakazura sequence, centering upon a dry career-maker, . . . and I doubt that I am going to like it this time around either"; but, a week later, "I am beginning to like Tamakazura. I like the solidity and efficiency with which she arranges her life. I suppose the truth is that as I grow older I like the sane, businesslike ones more and more, and more and more distrust the romantics." Of whom the chief is the shining Genji himself, favorite son of the old Emperor, glory of the Court, cynosure of men, lover of women; and, though Seidensticker acknowledges that Genji is sometimes sensitive and kind, he keeps arguing not only that his hero is a trifler and a cad ("He is not a very nice guy") but that the author had too much of a schoolgirl crush on him to judge him correctly. Now nothing is clearer in the novel than that Tamakazura is equally and simultaneously "a dry career-maker" and a "sane, businesslike" woman without missing a trick of either, or that Genji is chief of the romantics and sensitive and kind and a trifler and a cad, or that the author is interested in quite everything that boys and girls are made of, sugar and spice as well as frogs and snails and puppydogs' tails. For instance: having heard that the nurse who took care of him in his infancy and whom he hasn't seen for ages is very ill, Genji pays her a visit. As he waits to be admitted, he notices the house next door and, because of the position of the shutters and blinds (women were sequestered behind shutters, blinds, screens, curtains), "caught the outlines of pretty foreheads. . . . A pleasantly green vine was climbing a board wall. The white flowers, he thought [with a characteristic quirk of sensibility], had a rather self-satisfied look about them." He has one of his men pick a flower for him, whereupon a little girl runs out of the house with a fan and says, "Put it on this. It isn't much of a fan, but then it isn't much of a flower either." Afterward, in the room with the old nurse, there are solemn declarations ("In recent years there have been restrictions upon my movements," confides the great man, " . . . yet I become very depressed when the days go by and I do not see you. 'Would that there were on this earth no final partings' "); the old nurse sobs with joy ("Fond of the child she has reared, a nurse tends to look upon him as a paragon even if he is a half-wit. How much prouder was the old woman . . . for having been permitted to serve" her incomparable Genji); the scene would affect a heart of stone, and Genji is "deeply touched"; by the time he makes his departure, he and everybody else are weeping—"the scent of his sleeve, as he brushed away a tear, quite flooded the room" (robes of the elite of both sexes got doused with an individually blended perfume—"Cie is me"—just in advance of a formal occasion or a heavy date: once, preparing to zap his latest lovely, Genji "spent the whole day scenting his robes"):

> Genji left orders that prayers and services be resumed. As he went out he asked for a torch, and in its light examined the fan on which the "evening face" [the flower] had rested. It was permeated with a lady's perfume, elegant and alluring. On it was a poem in a disguised cursive hand that suggested breeding and taste. He was interested.

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"I think I need not ask whose face it is,
So bright, this evening face, in the shining dew."

"Who is living in the house to the west?" he asked Koremitsu [his servant, the son of his old nurse]. "Have you perhaps had occasion to inquire?"

At it again, thought Koremitsu. He spoke somewhat tartly. "I must confess that these last few days I have been too busy with my mother to think about her neighbors."

"You are annoyed with me. But this fan has the appearance of something it might be interesting to look into. Make inquiries, if you will, please, of someone who knows the neighborhood."

At it again, grumbles Koremitsu G. Seidensticker, who can't tell a churl from a charmer or the difference between a schoolgirl's crush on a rock star and a novelist's alertness to the complications of vitality.

His own translation belies him. Indebted to him for his consistently lucid and idiomatic Englishing of a novel as long as *War and Peace* and scarcely known in the West,[3] we don't wish to seem ungrateful; but even the most modest translators are susceptible to proprietary delusions about the texts for the dissemination of which they've done their scrupulous and civilizing work. Keeping an eye on the words isn't the whole story, but maybe it ought to be for Seidensticker, who can't help wondering whether Lady Murasaki has a "feminine" or a "masculine" point of view: a friend tells him cryptically that in Waley's translation it seems only masculine whereas in his it seems sometimes one and sometimes the other: he is perplexed (and so am I); and elsewhere he says curtly that he is "bored" by "The Broom Tree," a chapter through most of which on a rainy night four young men, including Genji and his best friend, have a meandering long-winded locker-room-and-men's-dorm-style bull-session about the peculiarities and limitations of women:

[3] Arthur Waley's translation (I read it twenty-six years ago and discussed the novel in an essay that was published in the Autumn 1955 issue of *The Hudson Review*) is very much on Seidensticker's mind. He says that he "grew up on it" and that he continues to admire it, but he presents evidence to the effect that—whereas Waley omits, curtails, amplifies, and alters—his own translation is faithful and complete. Reading Seidensticker's translation I didn't have the impression of reading a different novel from the one I more or less remembered. Anyhow, I was content to enjoy it without checking back on Waley's: half a million words multiplied by two are a lot of words. On his title page Waley calls the author "Lady Murasaki," a convenience for the critic because the principal female character of the novel is also called Murasaki; and, since the author was of an aristocratic family and the title "Lady" sounds natural in English for a woman of such rank, I'll use it in preference to the name which Seidensticker uses and by which she is known in Japan: Murasaki Shikibu, which isn't her real name either. "Murasaki" isn't her forename (which we don't know because "in Heian Japan it was bad manners to record the names of wellborn ladies, except, curiously, imperial consorts and princesses of the blood") but means "purple" and may in fact have been given to her because she gave it to her heroine; "Shikibu" isn't her surname but designates the office her father held: so the name is a nickname or convenient tag, like "Jack the Ripper" or "Lady Murasaki."

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"She was a woman of such accomplishments that I could leave everything to her. I continue to regret what I had done. I could discuss trivial things with her and important things. . . . "

Tō no Chūjō nodded. " . . . It is not easy in this world to find a perfect wife. We are all pursuing the ideal and failing to find it."

The guards officer talked on. "There was another one. I was seeing her at about the same time. She was more amiable than the one I have just described to you. Everything about her told of refinement. Her poems, her handwriting when she dashed off a letter, the koto she plucked a note on—everything seemed right. She was clever with her hands and clever with words. And her looks were adequate. The jealous woman's house had come to seem the place I could really call mine, and I went in secret to the other woman from time to time and became very fond of her. The jealous one died, I wondered what to do next. I was sad, of course, but a man cannot go on being sad forever. I visited the other more often. But there was something a little too aggressive, a little too sensuous about her. As I came to know her well and to think her a not very dependable sort, I called less often. And I learned that I was not her only secret visitor. . . . "

They talk and listen till daybreak, and, whether the author's point of view is masculine or feminine, she certainly seems to be in touch with the quick of the men's fears and fantasies and to know or guess just how such a session ebbs and flows in and out of consciousness. The guards officer does most of the talking, and in one of his more didactic moments he rattles off a volley of platitudes about the risks of philandering: Tō no Chūjō, who is not only Genji's best friend and jealous rival and envious inferior but the brother of his neglected wife, listens carefully and hopes tomcat Genji will take the lesson to heart; but "he was somewhat annoyed to note that Genji was silent because he had fallen asleep." Genji wakes up as soon as they get back to telling stories, but it's too late for him to be edified. If only people would stay awake during the lecture!

Maybe what bothers Seidensticker (and Tō no Chūjō) most about Genji is his elusiveness, his slipperiness, which seems a not very heroic or masculine quality; but then in any conventional sense Genji isn't a hero or even—except for his itch after women—masculine, he isn't forthright or pugnacious, indeed in the entire novel he is never once described as angry or ready for a fight though he has numerous setbacks including a several years' banishment; to get what he wants, he doesn't demand but coaxes and cajoles and insists; he yearns and worries a lot; when he is really up against the wall he can be alarmed, terrified, panicked, he can collapse in a funk; and maybe what bothers Seidensticker most about Lady Murasaki is that dealing with Genji she's as slippery as he is, she isn't categorical with him, she neither condones nor condemns, far from being goggle-eyed with adoration she is playful and ironic when he's having his way, solicitous when he's in trouble, gravely sympathetic when he's up against the final and irrevocable things and behaving no better than the rest of us.

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Because, as the affair with the lady of the house of the "evening faces" demonstrates, life isn't simple for Genji, fun is fun but doesn't stop there, not only is the best none too good but the worst is yet to come and nobody's ready for it. At the outset Genji has his customary success imposing himself on the lady (what the men of the time—even Genji—had to do, according to the author, was knock down several screens and elbow a few maidservants out of the way and commit a kind of soft-shelled rape), but then discovers to his surprise that he is caught against his will, he "had grown fond of her and felt that he must go on seeing her. They were of such different ranks, he tried to tell himself, and it was altogether too frivolous. Yet his visits were frequent." As with all of Genji's other women, there is no indication that he ever excites her to a frenzy, which moreover doesn't seem a prospect that occurs to him (or to her); like the guards officer he distrusts "aggressive" and "sensuous" women; what he wants is to be indulged: "Won over by his gentle warmth, she was indeed inclined to let him have his way. She seemed such a pliant little creature, likely to submit absolutely to the most outrageous demands." Besides, she lives in a workingclass neighborhood and Genji is fascinated by the unfamiliar surroundings: "Toward dawn he was awakened by plebeian voices in the shabby houses down the street. . . . He could make out every word. It embarrassed the woman that, so near at hand, there should be this clamor of preparation as people set forth on their sad little enterprises. Had she been one of the stylish ladies of the world, she would have wanted to shrivel up and disappear. She was a placid sort, however, and she seemed to take nothing . . . too seriously." On a whim he carries her off out of the bustling street to an isolated and creepy villa, where during the night he has a dream of a beautiful woman who reproaches him for his infidelity and seems to threaten the sleeping lady by his side. He rouses the attendants, certainly there are evil spirits that have been provoked and must be warded off:

> He reached for the girl. She was not breathing. He lifted her and she was limp in his arms. There was no sign of life. She had seemed as defenseless as a child, and no doubt some evil power had taken possession of her. He could think of nothing to do. A man came with a torch. Ukon [her servant] was not prepared to move, and Genji himself pulled up curtain frames to hide the girl.
>
> "Bring the light closer."
>
> It was a most unusual order. Not ordinarily permitted at Genji's side, the man hesitated to cross the threshold.
>
> "Come, come, bring it here! There is a time and place for ceremony."
>
> In the torchlight he had a fleeting glimpse of a figure by the girl's pillow. It was the woman in his dream. It faded away like an apparition in an old romance. In all the fright and horror, his confused thoughts centered upon the girl. There was no room for thoughts of himself.
>
> He knelt over her and called out to her, but she was cold and had stopped breathing. It was too horrible. He had no confidant to whom

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he could turn for advice. It was the clergy one thought of first on such occasions. He had been so brave and confident, but he was young, and this was too much for him. He clung to the lifeless body.

"Come back, my dear, my dear. Don't do this awful thing to me." But she was cold and no longer seemed human.

The worst has come and he isn't ready for it: "All was silence, terrifying solitude. He should not have chosen such a place—but it was too late now. Trembling violently, Ukon clung to him. He held her in his arms, wondering if she might be about to follow her lady." At last the reliable Koremitsu arrives, and begins to cope with what might turn out to be a dreadful scandal that would shatter Genji's career and break his father's heart: Koremitsu will carry the body to a mountain temple where he has an acquaintance and where a discreet funeral can be held—"Since Genji seemed incapable of the task, he wrapped the body in a covering and lifted it into the carriage. It was very tiny and very pretty, and not at all repellent. The wrapping was loose and the hair streamed forth, as if to darken the world before Genji's eyes." Later, over Koremitsu's objections, he rides "in the bleakest despair" through the night to the temple: "The light was turned away from the corpse. Ukon lay behind a screen. It must be terrible for her, thought Genji. The girl's face was unchanged and very pretty. 'Won't you let me hear your voice again?' He took her hand. 'What was it that made me give you all my love, for so short a time, and then made you leave me to this misery?' He was weeping uncontrollably." On the way back to the city, "as they came to the river Genji fell from his horse and was unable to remount, 'So I am to die by the wayside? I doubt that I can go on.'" But Koremitsu is there, and "Genji somehow pulled himself together . . . and was seen back to Nijō." Eventually he brings Ukon into his household, and often talks with her about their dead lady:

". . . She seemed so weak [says Ukon], but I can see now that she was a source of strength."

"The weak ones do have a power over us. The clear, forceful ones I can do without. I am weak and indecisive by nature myself, and a woman who is quiet and withdrawn and follows the wishes of a man even to the point of letting herself be used has much the greater appeal. A man can shape and mold her as he wishes, and becomes fonder of her all the while."

Surely this is one of the most extraordinary self-assessments by any romantic hero in literature, all the more extraordinary for being accurate. It also foretells Genji's decision to cheat the chanciness of love, when he abducts the beautiful child Murasaki to keep her for himself and shape and mold her as he wishes:

Though trembling violently, the girl managed to keep from sobbing aloud.

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"I always sleep with Shōnagon," she said softly in childish accents.

"Imagine a big girl like you still sleeping with her nurse."

Weeping quietly, the girl lay down.

Shōnagon sat up beside them, looking out over the garden as dawn came on. The buildings and grounds were magnificent, and the sand in the garden was like jewels. Not used to such affluence, she was glad there were not other women in this west wing. It was here that Genji received occasional callers. A few guards beyond the blinds were the only attendants.

They were speculating on the identity of the lady he had brought with him. "Someone worth looking at, you can bet."

But for once they are off the mark, Genji's plans this time are long-range, and he is determined to see to the last detail of everything:

He asked that children be sent from the east wing to play with her. "Pretty little girls, please." Four little girls came in, very pretty indeed.

The new girl, his Murasaki, still lay huddled under the singlet he had thrown over her.

"You are not to sulk, now, and make me unhappy. Would I have done all this for you if I were not a nice man? Young ladies should do as they are told." And so the lessons began. . . .

Staying away from court for several days, Genji worked hard to make her feel at home. He wrote down all manner of poems for her to copy, and drew all manner of pictures, some of them very good. "I sigh, though I have not seen Musashi," he wrote on a bit of lavender paper. She took it up, and thought the hand marvelous. In a tiny hand he wrote beside it:

> "Thick are the dewy grasses of Musashi,
> Near this grass to the grass I cannot have."

"Now you must write something."

"But I can't." She looked up at him, so completely without affectation that he had to smile.

He steals her and brings her up and, almost as soon as she comes to puberty, without a pang of conscience or any preparation deflowers her (an event that particularly vexes Seidensticker) and so can claim her as doubly his own—

He no longer had any enthusiasm for the careless night wanderings that had once kept him busy. Murasaki was much on his mind. She seemed peerless, the nearest he could imagine to his ideal. Thinking that she was no longer too young for marriage, he had occasionally made amorous overtures; but she had not seemed to understand. They had passed their time in games of Go and *hentsugi.* She was clever and she had many delicate ways of pleasing him in the most trivial diver-

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sions. He had not seriously thought of her as a wife. Now he could not restrain himself. It would be a shock, of course.

What had happened? Her women had no way of knowing when the line had been crossed. One morning Genji was up early and Murasaki stayed on and on in bed. It was not at all like her to sleep so late. Might she be unwell? As he left for his own rooms, Genji pushed an inkstone inside her curtains.

At length, when no one else was near, she raised herself from her pillow and saw beside it a tightly folded bit of paper. Listlessly she opened it. There was only this verse, in a casual hand:

> "Many have been the nights we have spent together
> Purposelessly, these coverlets between us."

She had not dreamed he had anything of the sort on his mind. What a fool she had been, to repose her whole confidence in so gross and unscrupulous a man.

It was almost noon when Genji returned. "They say you're not feeling well. What can be the trouble? I was hoping for a game of Go."

She pulled the covers over her head. Her women discreetly withdrew. He came up beside her.

"What a way to behave, what a very unpleasant way to behave. Try to imagine, please, what these women are thinking."

He drew back the covers. She was bathed in perspiration and the hair at her forehead was matted from weeping.

"Dear me. This does not augur well at all." He tried in every way he could think of to comfort her, but she seemed genuinely upset and did not offer so much as a word in reply.

(Nowhere else in the book does the author present a woman's reaction to the sex act; and the reaction here, no doubt justified by the circumstances, is indignation and disgust.) Women! says Genji. Men! says Genji's author: "Genji felt like a child thief. The role amused him and the affection he now felt for the girl seemed to reduce his earlier affection to the tiniest mote. A man's heart is a very strange amalgam indeed! He now thought that he could not bear to be away from her for a single night."

But he can bear it all right. "Felt like"; "seemed"; "thought that he could not": this world of shadows and appearances which isn't to be credited except for the momentary pleasures it offers. What Genji keeps saying but till he outlives her can't imagine is that he has met his match. The child grows up into the beautiful, loving, and ironic woman who knows him as well as her namesake the author does, who by her presence and example rejoices him as none of his other women can, but for whom as for the others he has the automatic words and gestures that scarcely try to hide his need to be somewhere else with somebody else sooner rather than later:

> She [it really doesn't matter which of his protégées this is] pleased

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him more and more. "There is something singularly appealing about her," he said to Murasaki. "Her mother was a little too solemn and humorless. She is very quick and bright, and somehow a person immediately wants to be friends with her. I am very sure now that she will not be an embarrassment."

Familiar with his inability to let well enough alone, she had guessed what was happening. "It must be rather difficult for her not to have any secrets and to be so completely dependent on you."

"And why should she not be dependent on me?"

She smiled. "Can you think that I have forgotten all the sighs and pains your way of doing things produced in my own younger years?"

How quick she was! "You find very odd and foolish things to worry about. Do you think she would permit anything of the sort?" He changed the subject . . .

—and he can always turn that dazzling light on: "Genji is so handsome," says Tō no Chūjō irritably, "that a smile from him can make you think all the world's problems have been solved." When, because he can't say no to the former emperor or to his own erotic curiosity, Genji takes a royal princess for a wife and thereby demotes Murasaki to second place, he returns from a visit with his new wife and "was filled with wonder at the more familiar lady":

They had been together for so many years, and here she was delighting him anew. She managed with no loss of dignity—and it was a noble sort of dignity—to be bright and humorous. He counted over the several aspects of beauty and found them here gathered together; and she was at her loveliest. But then she always seemed her loveliest, more beautiful each year than the year before, today than yesterday. It was her power of constant renewal that most filled him with wonder.

She slipped her jottings under an inkstone. He took them up. The writing was not perhaps her very best, but it had great charm and subtlety.

> "I detect a change in the green upon the hills.
> Is autumn coming to them? Is it coming to me?"

He wrote beside it, as if he too were at writing practice:

> "No change do we see in the white of the waterfowl.
> Not so constant the lower leaves of the *hagi.*"

She might write of her unhappiness, but she did not let it show. He thought her splendid.

Free this evening of obligations at Rokujō, he decided to hazard another secret visit to Nijō. Self-loathing was not enough to overcome temptation.

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Self-loathing is something new, but along with love and beauty it too isn't enough to keep him at home nights.

"The shining Genji was dead," writes the author not much later, when *The Tale of Genji* still has a third of its way to go, "and there was no one quite like him." With such a hero, the book is necessarily episodic in its structure: Genji isn't on a quest, doesn't limit himself to the one and only peerless lady (though he knows who she is and congratulates himself for having her around), doesn't defend a citadel or win a war or face a villain and face him down; all he does, besides taking his turn at running the country, is make love over and over again, because like a god he has the will and the power and nothing much else to do. Lady Murasaki magnificently imagines a man who has everything, even a wife both Galatea and Penelope, but at last he proves to be something of a bore not only to himself but to the author and the reader. Though she may have set out to give us a model and exemplar, she ends by showing that life is resistance, that the young Genji meets enough of it to keep himself and us occupied, but that as he gets older and the barriers fall away he finds himself, though more beautiful than ever, doing what he does because not desire and adventure but habit and momentum are stronger than love and loyalty; and by the time he is merely going through the motions so is Lady Murasaki. Authors sometimes lose heart at the same instant as their protagonists.

Lady Murasaki certainly doesn't have a crush on Genji, she isn't taken in by him, but like her namesake in the novel she loves him and therefore his fall is hers and brings a twilight down on the rest of the book. It's as if, having shown against her original intention—probably she wanted to write the life of the sexiest man in the world—that even for the sexiest man in the world life is resistance, she will now show with a kind of lover's spite, Genji being gone forever, that life is sad; and, whatever its truth, this is a far less absorbing and less dramatic proposition.

Seidensticker has many favorable things to say about the so-called "Uji chapters," the post-Genji section of the book; moreover it's easy to agree with him that the episode of Ukifune's dilemma, in which, unable to choose between her two importunate lovers, she attempts suicide, is the best in the section and—tense, sustained, unsentimental—among the best in the novel: "the obvious solution was for her to disappear." Nevertheless it's a very somber episode, and leads without a break into ever darker and deeper gloom, abysses of renunciation and piety without hope or joy. Besides he not only grants but emphasizes the obnoxiousness of the protagonist of this section: Kaoru (supposed by society to be Genji's son but in fact the son of his royal wife by another man), "saying the same thing over and over again at endless length"; "next to unbearable"; "an almost comic figure, all censorious and self-righteous"; "maybe nastiness is the nearest thing to a human trait that he has": in other words, though the translator doesn't say so, Hamlet without a pretext. The other important male character is Niou, Genji's grandson and Kaoru's best friend; and the two of them together make up a cruel because rather near parody of Genji: Life is a swindle. Both of them have exactly the same line as Genji

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(maybe it was the only way to get next to a highborn Japanese lady); Let me come into your parlor, said the spider to the fly, I'm all heart and no hands, you can trust me if you try; Move a little closer to the blinds or curtains, I can hardly hear you; Thud! clatter! bang! (the screens, blinds, curtains lifted up and pushed aside and bouncing on the tatami mats) but goodness gracious I'd rather die than do anything improper though I notice I'm clutching your instep: Niou, high-pitched and lightweight, races through the process like a speeded-up film with a Donald-Duck voice quacking out the flagrant Genjian fibs till the deed is done, whereas Kaoru intones them all in a voice of mournful sanctimony, slowed down to sound like Smokey Bear, and then—nothing but more talk: "The dawn came on, bringing an end to nothing. . . . 'Do you know what I would like [says Kaoru]? To be as we are now. To look out at the flowers and the moon, and be with you. To spend our days together, talking of things that do not matter.' " And do you know what the author would like? Three quarters of an hour with the young Genji; but he's dead and gone.

Another difference between the Uji section and the life of Genji is that, while the former resembles a chamber opera for three voices and small chorus, the latter teems with secondary characters who take the stage with all the assurance of prima donnas and leading tenors: Tō no Chūjō, a man's man and therefore always busy and never in doubt; Yugiri, Genji's shrewd and resentful son, on whom his father's charm doesn't make a dent because Yugiri intends to take over the territory ("People seem a little curious about your reasons for being so good to her," he says to Genji, who isn't accustomed to such bluntness and has to bob and weave for a moment); the pious old monk self-exiled to a remote island whose sole ambition, which he pursues with the zeal and cunning of a child movie star's mother, is to see his daughter safely installed in a liaison with Genji (who is very conscientious about his past ladies: keeps them comfortably pensioned off in one or another wing of his palace and occasionally spends a night for old times' sake); Genji's wicked stepmother, Kokiden, whose hatred of him and influence over her son the emperor bring about Genji's banishment; the apparently trapped and abject Tamakazura, who manages to scatter everybody else's projects in favor of her own; Higekuro announcing to his mad wife that he'll be fetching home another wife—

> Taking up a censer, she directed the perfuming of his robes. . . . It was rather wonderful that they had lived together for so long. He felt a little guilty that he should have lost himself so quickly and completely in a new infatuation. But he was more and more restless as the hours went by. . . .
>
> His attendants were nervous. "The snow seems to be letting up a little," said one of them, as if to himself. "It is very late."
>
> Moku and Chūjō and the others sighed and lay down and whispered to one another about the pity of it all. The lady herself, apparently quite composed, was leaning against an armrest. Suddenly she stood up, swept the cover from a large censer, stepped behind her husband,

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and poured the contents over his head. There had been no time to restrain her. The women were stunned.

The powdery ashes bit into his eyes and nostrils. Blinded, he tried to brush them away, but found them so clinging and stubborn that he had to throw off even his underrobes. If she had not had the excuse of derangement he would have marched from her presence and vowed never to return. It was a very perverse sort of spirit that possessed her.

The stir was enormous. He was helped into new clothes, but it was as if he had had a bath of ashes. There were ashes deep in his side whiskers. . . .

Who except a great novelist writing in the heyday of a tradition could conceive of such moments? Yet without a precedent, six centuries before Cervantes and in a feudal empire on the other side of the world, Lady Murasaki is inventing the novel—that middle-class European document—and such moments come to her as naturally and as often as in the heyday of the tradition they will come to Dickens.

This densely populated novel is also crowded with descriptions of festivals, concerts, dances, an art-judging contest, rituals, ceremonies, palaces, nunneries, the four seasons with their changing scenery—of all of which a sizable proportion seems intended for a more leisurely temperament of an earlier time. But Genji or one of the others is in the wings, and anything can happen. Maybe the next time Murasaki speaks Genji will listen. Maybe the next time Genji speaks and says nothing Murasaki will keep a speculative eye on the large censer just behind him.

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DENIS DONOGHUE

Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind*

HANNAH ARENDT DIED SUDDENLY on December 4, 1975, leaving *The Life of the Mind* unfinished.[1] She had planned a work in three parts: *Thinking, Willing,* and *Judging. Thinking* would be the longest part requiring fundamental definitions and descriptions, with chapters on consciousness, conscience, and imagination. *Willing* would mainly be a commentary on the voluntarist tradition in philosophy, with sections on Epictetus, Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Schelling, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jaspers, and, above all, Hegel. *Judging* would be short enough to fit comfortably in the volume on Willing, since it would amount to little more than a commentary on Kant. Arendt's friend and editor, Mary McCarthy, thinks that *Judging* would have raised more problems than those provided by a gloss on Kant and that this third section would have needed more space than a few chapters at the back of *Willing.* I am sure she is right. In any case the question was circumvented the hard way. *Judging* never got written. *Willing* was completed a few days before Arendt's death, though there are some indications that it had not received, like *Thinking,* the advantage of being delivered as lectures in various forms and before diverse audiences. *Thinking* was first given as the Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen in 1973 and again, perhaps in somewhat different form and tone, as lectures at the New School for Social Research in New York. Presumably it received different responses, different interpretations: it would be an erudite joke to deliver the same lectures in Aberdeen and New York, if my knowledge of those cities is reliable. The last pages of *Willing* drift beyond their theme, presumably because Arendt intended working up the momentum again for *Judging.* Nothing exists of *Judging* apart from a few pages of lecture-notes which might have been incorporated in the finished work; or might not.

The Life of the Mind is clearly related to *The Human Condition,* another work construed in threes: three cardinal concepts, six chapters. The six chapters are: "The Human Condition," "The Public and the Private Realm," "Labor," "Work," "Action," "The *Vita Activa* and the Modern Age." Of the three concepts, labor refers to man surviving in the world but leaving nothing of himself behind as a sign that he has lived; work refers to man transforming the world in which he lives, leaving artifacts behind to indicate the form in which he has lived; and action refers to man's life in society, institutions, politics, the speech of his time and place. Arendt never said in so many words that the *vita activa* is more important than the *vita contemplativa;* though a reader who drew that implication

[1] THE LIFE OF THE MIND: THINKING; WILLING, by *Hannah Arendt.* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $25.00 two volumes.

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from *The Human Condition* would be hard to refute. One of her motives in planning *The Life of the Mind* may have been to restore a lost or doubtful balance, to speak up for the *vita contemplativa* in terms which would complete Arendt's sense of the plenitude of human life.

There is another possibility. I have no evidence in its favor beyond a hunch and a few circumstantial factors. At best, the notion is plausible. Recall that Arendt published *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 1963 and that the book, even more than the *New Yorker* articles on which it was based, caused a dreadful pother especially in Jewish intellectual circles. It is my impression that Arendt went to Jerusalem in a fairly innocent mood: she was to report the trial and add such comment and elucidation as seemed warranted. There was no suggestion that she should write the entire history of the Jewish people or of the Holocaust: my reading of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* suggests that its purpose was limited, however serious. Many questions which were raised in the ensuing war of words had not appeared in the book, for the adequate reason that they had not arisen from the situation Arendt was contracted to report. Anyway, the book caused an appalling storm. When Arendt came to defend herself against attack, she showed not only the normal spiritedness of a writer under interrogation, but something more, a pervasive resentment. True, several of the attacks were delivered in extraordinarily personal terms. Arendt's professional competence was questioned: in some of these attacks she was presented as a journalist, an amateur, flagrantly relying upon secondary sources. Readers were assured that the real scholars in this dangerous field were Dr. X and Professor Y, men of no public fame. It is a common situation. Arendt's replies to Gershom Scholem, Jacob Robinson, and Walter Z. Laqueur are reprinted in *The Jew as Pariah,*[2] an extraordinarily interesting collection of her essays on Jewish themes and situations between 1942 and 1966. Only one aspect of her replies concerns me at the moment; her feeling of outrage that these things should be said and written about her work. She did not retract one word of *Eichmann in Jerusalem.* Confronted with heavy scholars, she went out of her way to show that they were lighter than they thought. Am I merely saying that when bitten she defended herself? No, the feeling she displayed went far beyond the requirement of defence. This was the first occasion on which her integrity as a Jew had been questioned. She was already a famous political thinker, well established in the history of politics, the foremost authority on totalitarianism: she knew what it meant to be in danger. Her credentials were impeccable. But in 1963 she found herself dragged into the politics of Jewish history not as a student but as a participant, in some eyes a traitor. It is clear that the experience could not be forgotten, transcended, set aside. It is my notion that *The Life of the Mind* was planned only indirectly to be set beside *The Human Condition:* its true origin is *Eichmann in Jerusalem.*

Arendt gives us reason for associating the two books and the circumstances in which *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was written and received. In the first pages of *Thinking* she says that the immediate impulse to write the

[2] THE JEW AS PARIAH, by *Hannah Arendt.* Grove Press. $12.50.

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book came from attending the trial of Eichmann. When she coined the famous phrase "the banality of evil," a phrase that particularly shocked Scholem, incidentally, she was aware that the phrase ran counter to the main traditions of thought. Evil has normally been considered a demonic phenomenon, evil people have been assumed to be monsters, driven by deep forces of pride, lust, or envy. In Jerusalem she listened to evidence of deeds that were, in every way, monstrous, but she saw in Eichmann a little man, ordinary, commonplace, neither Macbeth nor Richard the Third. He was not an ideological maniac or, so far as the eye could see, a freak of nature, a mad doctor loose from science fiction. His most notable characteristic, she concluded, "was not stupidity but *thoughtlessness*." Arendt went back to the theme in her reply to Scholem, a letter dated July 24, 1963, when she said that evil, in her opinion, is never "radical," it is only extreme, it possesses "neither depth nor any demonic dimension." She continued:

> It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is "thought-defying," as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its "banality." Only the good has depth and can be radical.

Such reflections prompted Arendt to think again about thought. Hence *The Life of the Mind.*

But there is more to be said. Maybe Arendt should have written a book about evil rather than one about thought; unless she assumed that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* said whatever she had to say about evil. In fact, she said little, she merely replaced a trope of depth by a trope of surface. If you speak of "radical evil," you mean that in some sense the root of the criminal is corrupt, the springs of his life are already poisoned: choose your metaphor. The problem then is to connect his surface with his depth, either for treatment or forgiveness. If you decide that his "culture" is continuous with his "nature," you deal with him accordingly. It is true that in dealing with monstrous crimes (such as those committed by the Manson gang; or the Moors murders in England) the easiest way of dealing with our own bewilderment is by assuming that the criminal is mad, deranged. This assumption either disengages his "depth" from his "surface" or otherwise allows us to consign his depth to the darkness which contains all the other forces we have had no success in understanding. At all costs we feel we have to remove the acts from the realm of morality; if left there, we would have to deal with them rationally. A common stratagem is to translate crime into picturesque terms, normally involving aesthetic descriptions as of sublime scenes in landscape, storms, lightning, floods, acts of a curiously wilful God. We speak of "great" criminals when we have translated them out of morality into history, legend, fiction: Dr. Crippen, etc. Arendt's phrase about the banality of evil outraged people because it removed from monstrous crimes the depth and darkness to which we usu-

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ally consign them; it gave them no depth but merely surface. To say that evil is banal has the consequence of taking the supposed depth and profundity out of it and levelling it: it is then supposed to be widespread, commonplace, trite. My own feeling is that Arendt in Jerusalem felt it necessary somehow to treat the Nazi crimes not with outrage, horror, and so forth but with contempt: she could only do that by finding them merely trite, parasitical like fungus. She had to convince herself that there was nothing more to them than what was visible in the wretched Eichmann. If then her logic had to assume that the world is full of little Eichmanns, it also had to assume that the quality they (we) all share is not some inexplicable vice at the root of our lives but ordinary thoughtlessness. What else can we be guilty of? It is indeed frustrating to "look" at Charles Manson; there is nothing to see beneath his skin. What would we see if we looked at Jim Jones?

Arendt's theme, then, became not evil but thoughtlessness, and therefore thought, thinking, the *vita contemplativa.* It is my notion that after the Eichmann controversy she found herself wanting to withdraw from the good-or-bad world of politics, to move back into herself for a while. And when she did, in *The Life of the Mind,* she endorsed the tradition of thought in which Good is identified with Being, and Evil becomes a mere defect of Being. If you want to deny that Evil has a positive or radical character in itself, how better than to treat it as a defect, a default of Being? This approach puts Arendt much closer to Aquinas and the Thomist tradition generally than to anything either Jewish or German which her readers might have expected. It is odd to find her quoting Gilson's *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* so often in *Willing* and glossing with such zest the tradition, largely indicated by Augustine and conceptually sharpened by Aquinas, in which a man's goodness is identified with the fullness of his being, and evil is deemed to be not a principle but a condition, a condition of absence and privation. The interest of these glosses becomes even more exciting when the reader, recalling Arendt's pained letter to Scholem, finds her saying in *Willing* that "because of its privative character, absolute or radical evil cannot exist." The phrase "radical evil" is Kant's, but Arendt is right to assert that the notion of evil as privation of Being makes more sense within the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas than elsewhere. Aristotle is crucial, of course, to *The Human Condition,* and Aquinas is featured there at least occasionally, but I found myself surprised, reading *The Life of the Mind,* to see these masters largely determining the tone of the entire book. I cannot say whether Arendt's concept of evil as privation was present in her mind all along: it may have established itself from the years in which she worked on her doctoral study of the place of love in Augustine's philosophy. I have not found it in *The Human Condition,* but it is not required for the development of that argument. It may be that it lay dormant in her mind until prodded into life by the fury of her Jewish friends; and that she has now made it more explicit, to establish that *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* far from being an aberration, has the support of one of the great traditions of Western philosophy.

I hope I have not confused the issue. Thus far, I have merely been

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saying that while *The Life of the Mind* is philosophically akin to *The Human Condition,* it has a far more personal relation to the controversy provoked by *Eichmann in Jerusalem.* The only difference this makes, if the reader entertains the notion at all, is that it provides for *The Life of the Mind* a more tendentious context than anything issuing from *The Human Condition.* Concepts which appear pretty urbane when read in the uncontroversial light of *The Human Condition* become much more telling, incriminating, compromising, and so on when read in the more lurid light of the Eichmann book. One of the many advantages of having *The Jew as Pariah* at hand while reading *The Life of the Mind* is that the light becomes lurid again, showing both books as forensic rather than urbane. A further advantage is that Arendt's notion of thinking is seen as one answer to precisely the involvement in worldly strife which is documented in *The Jew as Pariah.*

Enough of this; perhaps too much. But consider the propriety of Arendt's idea of thinking; that thinking requires the thinker to withdraw from the world of action, seceding from the world for the time being so that thinking may take place. The "place" of thinking is not the given world but a created space, a parenthesis in the life of the body: present to the thinking mind are the invisibles of experiences. The object of thought is not the particular thing, the immediate case: not things but the principle of their operation is the mind's business. Arendt gives the example of Socrates, who was in the habit of withdrawing from company and turning his mind upon invisible things. The fact that complete withdrawal is impossible does not hurt the case: the mind is incorporated in a bodily self, an appearance among appearances, so it is forced to stay in the world and to act against itself in that circumstance. No matter: the mind, in thought, abstracts itself, makes a space for itself, and lives this double life in the world. Thinking becomes impossible only when we allow ourselves to be distracted by distractions, living ceaselessly in company: in such a flurry, the questions of consciousness, conscience, and imagination cannot arise. But the thinker does not play solitaire. Thinking may begin as the thinker's determination to secede from the world for a while, but Arendt's mind is too politically committed to allow us to regard thought as a lonely act. Call it soliloquy if you like; because a soliloquy is a speaking to oneself, the soundless dialogue which is still commonly recognised in the form of conscience. If you have a troubled conscience, it means that your conscience is speaking harsh truths to you, and you are listening, however reluctantly. But consciousness, too, is a speaking: thinking is an act by which the thinker speaks to himself; in solitude, yes, and so far as possible in a state a little apart from the busy world. Presumably the reason why soliloquies in the theatre don't seem odd is that thinking is naturally construed as an internal dialogue. Arendt makes a beautiful distinction between being solitary and being lonely. Thinking is a solitary but not lonely business. Loneliness comes about, she says, when I am alone without being able to keep myself company; when, as Jaspers said, "ich bleibe mir aus," I am in default of myself. But solitude is the human situation in which I keep myself company, I am at home to myself. The distinction is not merely charming. The last sentence of *The Human Condition* is also the

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first of *The Life of the Mind:* Cato's sentence, Numquam se plus agere quam nihil cum ageret, numquam minus solum esse quam cum solus esset: "Never is he more active than when he does nothing, never less alone than when he is by himself." But Arendt could use that sentence to end one book and begin another only by attaching to that "solus" the meaning of "solitary" rather than "lonely." And her reverence for Jaspers is aroused mainly, I think, by his devising a form of philosophy "that conceives of truth and communication as one and the same": I take the phrase from her second essay on Jaspers in *Men in Dark Times.* Arendt has always suspected as bogus any attempt to drive experience beyond the reach of speech: speech with others is what makes man a political being, she wrote in *The Human Condition;* speech with ourselves is what makes us thoughtful beings, she implies in *The Life of the Mind.* The chapter on Action in *The Human Condition* takes as its epigraph Isak Dinesen's statement that "all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them." When our friends die, we tell stories about them; partly for the story, partly for the relief of the telling, mostly for the relief of speech, telling, and listening. In the same chapter Arendt argues that self-disclosure in speech is absolutely fundamental. "The basic error of all materialism in politics," she writes,"—and this materialism is not Marxian and not even modern in origin, but as old as our political theory—is to overlook the inevitability with which men disclose themselves as subjects, as distinct and unique persons, even when they wholly concentrate upon reaching an altogether worldly, material object."

That sentence was first published in 1958. If I had quoted it two or three years ago, I would have felt obliged to defend it against those critics who go far out of their way and some distance out of themselves to refute the terminology of subject and self. But a defence would be redundant. Arendt is not speaking for some imperial self but merely for the inevitability, or the ease, with which people disclose themselves by speaking to others or even to themselves. I don't think she would feel intimidated by recent assertions that the speech in which we fancy we disclose ourselves is already compromised, soiled, misshapen beyond redemption, that our speech is not ours at all. Those who argue along this line are sometimes critics, sometimes philosophers, more often critics masquerading as philosophers. Arendt was a political philosopher; she had no patience with forms of intellection which could not be practised in speech and action. If our speech is not good enough, that is a pity: regret it, then do whatever you can to improve it. Then speak again. Work with the given, and plan to improve upon it. Even today, does anyone really believe that he is a ventriloquist's dummy, moving his lips only to utter codes forced upon his mind by others? The alternative belief is not some monstrous angelic pretention in which we achieve direct engagement with essences without the mediation of language or noise. There is too much noise, God knows. Nonetheless, it is possible to speak truly, and some people manage to do even more than that, to speak with a degree of eloquence which no contract offers.

After thinking; then willing. Arendt's account of willing is an elaborate

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version of the essay on freedom in *Between Past and Future.* Again the clue is speech. She distinguishes two different ways of understanding the faculty of will. One is a faculty of choice between given objects or goals, the *liberum arbitrium,* which acts as arbiter between given ends and ponders freely the merits of the choice. Another is "our faculty for beginning spontaneously a series in time," as Kant described it, or, in Augustine's version, "initium ut esset homo creatus est," man's capacity for beginning because he himself is a beginning. The examination of Will is darkened by modern concepts of Progress; or rather, by the failure or abeyance of any such optimism at large today. It is still a question of our speech, because in the exercise of Will there is a commanding voice and there is an obeying voice. As Nietzsche put it in *Beyond Good and Evil,* "we are in every given case at the same time those who issue the orders and those who obey them." Nietzsche got over the obvious problem of command and coercion by identifying the commanding voice as the true "I" and treating the obeying or coerced voice as a necessary obstacle in the experience of willing. Arendt's account of this question is exhilarating, and fully compatible with the plan of her book: thinking is associated with serenity, the experience of presence, of being present to oneself; willing is associated with tension, the dual burden of time and decision.

These questions are debated mainly by commenting upon the philosophers who had much to say about Will. Now and again I felt brash enough to want to intervene. When Arendt offered a brisk paragraph about potentiality and actuality in Aristotle, I wanted to speak from the floor and say that certain other aspects of the question were sufficiently important to make Joyce's Stephen Dedalus attend to them in an earlier chapter of *Ulysses.* When she spoke, too briefly, of habit, I wanted her to go on much further and ponder the force of prejudice, including the prejudice which Burke (Edmund, not Kenneth) defended so vigorously. I suppose the reason why *Willing* provokes such frustrated interventions and *Thinking,* on the whole, doesn't, is that the latter proceeds directly to its elucidations, while the former enters into debate with various philosophers of the Will. When two people are arguing, there is always a third (in this case, the reader) who wants to seize the microphone.

As for judgment: there are hints. Arendt quotes Kant as saying that judgment "is a peculiar talent which can be practised only and cannot be taught." When the thinking ego moving among invisibles and generalities emerges from its space and returns to the noisy world, it finds particular appearances and needs a new gift or faculty to deal with them. Judgment "always concerns particulars and things close at hand": its chief character is to make thinking real, make it manifest in the world of appearances, discriminating between right and wrong, beautiful and ugly. I suppose any account of judging would have to include some chapters on taste, but I can't say I regret the loss of that theme from Arendt's unwritten pages. I regret much more the loss of chapters which would try to explain what judgment is in questions of morality and politics. Imagine a book which would explain how Hannah Arendt reached and exercised the judgment she expressed in the case of Eichmann vs. the Human Race. I have no

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reason to think that she would have done such a thing in *Judging*, but it seems permissible to imagine what form an unwritten work would have taken and to seize, for such a conceit, whatever latitude we want. What does the mind do when, having withdrawn to itself for thinking, it comes back to the public world, audible always and at worst merely noisy, and speaks itself? The speech issues from thinking and willing. Engaged with serious matters, it speaks a judgment. How does it judge? We know little of this matter, we suspect that our judgments are more often than not mere functions of habit, defensiveness, laziness, the mechanics of consistency, mood, God knows what else. This is the question Hannah Arendt did not live to answer. Perhaps we could form an answer by searching her earlier writings and construing them in a spirit of judgment; but more would have to be said, and she cannot now say it. It is sad. But at least we have *Thinking* and *Willing*, two forms of mind in the aspect of its nobility; Arendt's nobility. The crucial quality of these books, as of Arendt's writing in general, is that ideas long considered the property of professional philosophers and psychologists are examined by a political philosopher; that is, by a mind concerned with definitions chiefly because they lead to consequences in the world and in ourselves.

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JAMES FINN COTTER

The Loveliest Woman Born

HER FAVORITE POEM BY WILLIE YEATS, said Maud Gonne in old age, was one written in the first years of their friendship, "The Two Trees." It is an unexpected and revealing choice. In light of what she became in the poet's eyes, the lyric sounds prophetic: two trees spring up in the beloved's soul, one of "trembling flowers," the other of "broken boughs and blackened leaves." He bids her: "Beloved, gaze in thine own heart" where the holy tree grows, and "Gaze no more in the bitter glass" which reflects a fatal image of barren weariness and restless thoughts. In later life, Yeats left no doubt which tree Maud Gonne had cultivated:

> Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
> Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,
> Because of her opinionated mind
> Barter that horn and every good
> By quiet natures understood
> For an old bellows full of angry wind?
> "Prayer for my Daughter"

Unlike Petrarch's Laura and all the women praised by poets since, this ladylove spreads no laurel tree: "Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind / And took a mess of shadows for its meat." Maud had become druidess wraith to her former lover.

Her present image in Dublin's pub-lic memory corresponds to Yeats's portrait: a chain-smoking, tough-minded lady with several French paramours behind her, given to "maudgonning" or strident speeches on street corners, and living on into sick, sour, useless old age. She is often confused with Constance Markievicz as one of the dynamiting feminists who battled the British and then the Free Staters. The Irish, who do not suffer from short memories for tall tales, also remember Yeats as a charlatan who made hay of Maud's refusal to marry him (and his monkey glands!) while American scholars munch away contentedly at the feed bag of their affair.

Nancy Cardozo's biography of Maud Gonne offers a healthy antidote to these sad caricatures of a generous, brilliant, courageous, and complex woman.[1] The good is oft interred with activists' bones: they relied on deeds not words to change their worlds. Maud's chance to have her story told has been hampered by the disappearance of her correspondence with Yeats and the destruction of her papers by Free State soldiers in 1922. Her autobiography, *A Servant of the Queen* (a too-subtle reference to Maeve

[1] LUCKY EYES AND A HIGH HEART, The Life of Maud Gonne, by *Nancy Cardozo.* Bobbs-Merrill. $15.00.

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or Cathleen), suffers from its rambling presentation and lack of documentation and dates. A biography of Samuel Levenson published in 1976 quotes extensively from letters and her book, but leaves the character of the heroine unresolved. The author's final judgment disappoints: "Maud Gonne was never very good at knowing what was best for her."

The opposite is true, as Cardozo proves. Maud determined early in life that her own sweet will would be heaven's will and that she and her upper-class English world would part company. She fondly repeated the story of her conversion:

> "When I was still quite a little girl I used to go riding through the country on a pony beside my father. It was the time of the evictions and I used to see people standing in front of their unroofed cottages from which the police held them back, and weeping bitterly. I thought to myself, 'When I grow up I'm going to change all that. Yes, I'm going to change all that.' "

She bent all her soul, beauty, and talent to that purpose. Her thin six-foot frame, flashing hazel eyes, petal-blossom complexion, and deep auburn hair struck all who met her: she looked extraordinarily alive. However, it was her child-like sincerity, melodious voice, and single-hearted dedication that won their approval. In conversation or in crowds, she won people over because she took a magnetic interest in them. Unlike Yeats, who felt uncomfortable in large gatherings, she thrived on speaking to thousands at a time, whether to Americans for financial support or evicted farmers for unity against landlords. She overwhelmed her audiences with appeals to their sense of justice or to their ability to hope and take action. Her speeches were her poems and into old age she would mount any podium to plead for hungry children, political prisoners, oppressed workers, or a united Ireland. Wrapped in traditional black for mourning, Maud stood up to remind the Irish of how their leaders had failed them.

Ireland represented for Maud the spiritual center of the modern struggle to restore harmony between the people and the land in a spirit of freedom. Brought up to live in three capitals, London, Paris, and Dublin, she chose Dublin for the last half of her eighty-seven years because it embodied the worst political nightmare that might yet wake to be utopia. England proved to be a worthy foe: promising and never delivering, intriguing, infiltrating, lying. It forged Parnell's and Casement's papers to destroy them, freed prisoners with international fanfare and began immediately to re-arrest them, and even maneuvered the Irish into fighting one another. Maud fought England tooth and nail. She was one of the first to use magic-lantern slides of devastated farmhouses and ragged refugees to bring home the reality of remote suffering. She recalled the ravages of the Great Famine and gave her own eyewitness accounts of the homeless wandering the roads, starvation, men maimed by imprisonment. Violence or pacifism, communism or fascism, democracy or anarchy, all were weapons against British imperialism. She wanted only food in children's

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stomachs, roofs over families' heads, streets rid of militia, courts unbought by power.

Maud's liaison with the French nationalist Lucien Millevoye initiated her into the practical world of the revolutionary as propagandist. "La Belle Irlandaise" set herself up in Paris as a one-woman press service and lecture bureau. She also learned the importance of organization. When Irish political and literary groups excluded her as a woman, she founded her own Daughters of Erin in 1900 to "pledge mutual help and support, and to work for the cause of Irish Independence." They organized the largest peaceful demonstration held in Dublin by having thirty thousand schoolchildren march in protest to English rule. Their male comrades branded the women as harpies, furies, and hysterical females who "steadily eliminated from themselves every womanly feeling."

Yeats, who should have known better and did, fell into the same chauvanistic whining about Maud. Even sharp-tongued Oliver Gogarty could at times be kinder, acknowledging her charmed voice and large heart. But he was not in love. Willie's almost thirty-year courtship wears a new look in Cardozo's account: he is the dreamer and she the catalyst. Under her spell he hopes to establish a Castle of Heroes where free souls can come for meditation and renewal; together they join in a spiritual marriage that allows them to share visions even while apart; he writes poetry in praise of her beauty and remoteness, regretting her devotion to causes rather than to the poet himself. When Maud at last gave herself to him physically, she still protested that their differences and her needs made marriage impossible. At last, after proposing to Maud's daughter Iseult, Yeats married Georgie Hyde-Lees when he was fifty-two.

Maud's own previous marriage to the patriot John MacBride may have been motivated, as Cardozo believes, by her attraction to a fellow activist and her wish to make her Irish commitment more legitimate. The relationship quickly spoiled and led to a publicly drawn-out, bitter divorce case. The marriage was Maud's biggest mistake because it prevented her presence in Dublin during the crucial struggle for Independence and blackened her reputation with the Irish leadership. In disguise, she smuggled herself back into Ireland to work for hungry schoolchildren and prisoner release. Twice jailed herself, she organized the Women's Prisoners' Defence League for the liberation of the twelve thousand men and women held by the Free State during the Civil War, among them her son Sean MacBride and his future wife Catalina Bulfin.

To Maud's dismay, Yeats identified with the Free State, accepting a senatorial post and supporting the loyalty oath to England. The idealist writer and the realist reformer drifted apart, only to be reconciled in the last years of the poet's life. He pined for the silk kimonos girls wore long ago in stately mansions, but showed no sympathy for the women who sacrificed everything for the freedom he now enjoyed. Instead of the blessed Castle, he envisioned an elitist state ruled by aristocrats with a heavy, leather-gloved hand. We forgive the poet, as Auden said, "for writing well."

We have less to forgive Maud Gonne, yet she remains the old bellows

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Yeats and the Irish retrieved from the mess of shadows of their own fears and suspicions. Nancy Cardozo retells the story of Maud's life with conviction, drama, and poetry. She does not overwhelm with detail—there is much more of that in the Levenson biography—but she probes her characters, contrasting them as foils and bringing them together as compatriots. She also provides new accurate information about Maud's birthdate and the spiritual-sexual relationship with Willie. She introduces the surprises in her story with casual aplomb: Maud's conversion to Catholicism, her sudden decision to marry MacBride, and the consummation of her affair with Yeats. She quotes a wealth of unpublished material, although she omits one of the most revealing entries in the poet's published journals:

> Today the thought came to me that PIAL [Maud's secret initials in the Order of the Golden Dawn] never really understands my plans, or nature, or ideas. Then came the thought, what matter? How much of the best I have done and still do is but the attempt to explain myself to her? If she understood, I should lack reason for writing, and one never can have too many reasons for doing what is so laborious.
>
> *Memoirs*, p. 142

That is the poet speaking, but there is something calculating and self-centered in the observation. Yeats failed to see that he himself was more truly blind to her plans, nature, and ideas. What matter? Well, a great deal matters since Maud's real character lies hidden beneath the mask the poet fashioned for her, "Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind."

Maud bides her time for the truth to be known now that it has been so eloquently told in this masterful—or mistressful—biography. The heroine may have baffled the bard but not her biographer. Yet even he found as much to praise when in later years he blamed her:

> No dark tomb-haunter once; her form all full
> As though with magnanimity of light,
> Yet a most gentle woman; who can tell
> Which of her forms has shown her substance right?
>
> "A Bronze Head"

If in the past readers have thought the poet's praise rather than his blame too extravagant, now we should know better "Which of her forms has shown her substance right." Of the Two Trees Maud chose the one of trembling flowers. "The loveliest woman born" bartered no horns and rightly upset "every good / By quiet natures understood." They needed upsetting and still do.

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DEAN FLOWER

Picking up the Pieces

THE SIGNIFICANT FACT ABOUT MUCH AMERICAN STORYTELLING this past season is its obsession with looking backward. Anything but the present, it seems, will do: the McCarthy era, the War years on an Iowa farm or in Philadelphia, the New Jersey shore in the thirties, rural Vermont when Coolidge was President, Boston and Saratoga Springs at the turn of the century. The "great days," it is fashionable to lament, are over. Nostalgia touches all. As one character sorrows over why she ever sold her "vintage" Thunderbird, so others wonder where is the beautiful girl I used to be? Or the splendidly physical man? A John Updike character puts it this way:

> "But it's boring back home now. The Cold War is over, Nixon's over. All that's left is picking up the pieces and things like kissing OPEC's ass. You'd be depressed. It turns out the Fifties were when all the fun was, though nobody knew it at the time."

As if puzzled to find the present so dull or intractable, so exhausted and apparently doomed, these characters—pressured by the novelists behind them—search the past for explanations. Many of them have heavy confessions to make, for looking backward is a way to intensify regret, guilt, and disillusionment just as much as a way to celebrate more romantic eras. Naturally then, the current fiction dwells upon growing old even while it pretends to look in the opposite direction. What's odd is that so many of the younger writers are doing it.

Ann Beattie gets closer to the present than anyone else these days, but her characters don't.[1] The ironic title of her new collection of stories hints at romantic possibilities, but the secrets turn out to be painful to know and the surprises unwanted. Typical secret: an estranged husband sends a charming note to reveal he's "out West" but there's no return address. Typical surprise: a lover shows up a day before he's planned for and announces he's going to Europe alone. The larger secret about Beattie's characters is, why does she (he) go on taking all that abuse from him (her)?

None of the tales in this collection seem as funny and sharply-focused as those in her first collection, *Distortions.* In fact, many of them are deceptively complicated. "A Vintage Thunderbird," for example, revolves around Nick who wants to revive a romance with Karen who is involved with a psychology professor, also a young man named Kirby, and possibly others. Kirby has a relationship with an older man named Dr. Kel-

[1] SECRETS AND SURPRISES, by *Ann Beattie.* Random House. $8.95.

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logg. Karen cares for Kirby's cats when he goes away. When Karen goes away, Nick (who is really the central figure in all this) gets the keys to Karen's Thunderbird. As the story begins, Nick and Karen return from a weekend with Stephanie and Sammy, an older couple living in the country. Petra, a woman at Nick's office, falls for Nick who dumps her rudely when Karen calls to inform him that Stephanie is coming to New York to get an abortion. Nick gets mugged, Karen disappears with the professor, Petra gets revenge by standing up Nick, so pregnant Stephanie feels sorry for Nick and sleeps with him. And that is only about half of this compact little narrative, and not after all the half of it.

What clarifies this complex mechanism is Nick's curious passivity, which is echoed in all the other figures. In every way imaginable he is put upon. He has learned the part to perfection:

> "What you just said about my hanging up on you," Nick said. "I was thinking that you were going to hang up on me. When I talk to people, they hang up on me. The conversation just ends that way."

Guilty about having slept with the man's wife, Nick must now listen dumbly to a lengthy criticism of his character and advice about what he should do with his life. Petra similarly confesses, "I'm always letting myself in for it, agreeing to see men who treat me badly." Nor is Karen exempt from this passivity: she expects to get stood up by her professor, and sure enough while they vacation in Bermuda he takes off for London, leaving her with a bad sunburn. Similarly, Stephanie endures her husband's bullying, suave Dr. Kellogg puts up with Kirby's ill-mannered cats, and Kirby feels dished by Karen. There's even a cab driver beleagured by fares who change their minds and (like everyone else in the story) want to go right back where they came from.

The story suggests an infinite regress. Nick wants to go back where he and Karen started, taking a romantic night ride in her new Thunderbird. When she sells it to a scheming garage man who knows its collector's value, Nick suffers another rejection in his seven-year dangling romance. Karen offers to be put-upon once more: "Do you think maybe we could get it back if I offered him more than he paid me for it?" How eagerly Beattie's characters will pay to be deceived once more. It's as if they want to be mugged.

Yet their fascination lies in this eerie passivity. They comprise a new lost generation, congregating in apartment houses in New York or New Haven or Cambridge, setting up uneasy cooperatives in underheated old houses in New Hampshire or Vermont, anxious about identity and career and love but seldom about money. In "La Petite Danseuse de Quatorze Ans" the daughter of a famous poet finds herself attractive to the son of a famous painter. After they decide to live together, she discovers his deepest passion is to make her hate her father as much as he hates his. Even as she protests this lie, the possibility of its half-truth seeps in, eroding her certainty and leaving her suspended in doubt. In "Weekend" another naive young woman puts up with a fifty-five year old man, formerly a pro-

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fessor, who fathers her two children, drinks too much, invites former students to stay for long weekends, and ignores her. She endures it because she knows how much self-loathing the man feels and how impotent his love-fantasies with former students really are. She feels the same things, intensified through him. Moral: "there can be too much communication between people."

Beattie's characters are narcissists who can't bear to look at themselves. The twist in "The Lawn Party" is that the put-upon hero (who has lost his right arm in his lover's suicide crash, *à la Jules and Jim*) lashes out venomously at everyone instead of taking it all lying down. He needs the help of an admiring student of his, the sort of friend rare in these stories who does not impose his own injured vision of himself on others but advises simply, "Never look back." That is how we all get immobilized, Beattie's stories imply. We use sentimental visions of the past to excuse present failures of courage. Flawed by gossipy complications, uncertain of focus, and weakened by a plain style that too often goes flat, these are nevertheless stories to reckon with. Ann Beattie is an unsparing moralist of her generation.

Alice Adams usually finds the past more attractive than Beattie does.[2] She has been represented in every O. Henry Award collection for the last eight years, and her three novels (most recently, *Listening to Billie* last year) have received much praise, but to my mind her fiction fails—despite its numerous attractions—to offer a sufficiently serious criticism of the worlds she knows so well. Adams moves easily from Chapel Hill to New England to San Francisco, usually in the society of the rich: "Ardis Bascomb," the title story begins, "the tobacco heiress, who twenty years ago was a North Carolina beauty queen, is now sitting in the kitchen of her San Francisco house, getting drunk."

Adams's favorite strategy is to place an interesting woman, frequently a beautiful one marred by fat or scars or terminal illness or age, at the center of her stage, and then supply her with admirers: a handsome, successful, dullish lover; a teen-ager disturbed but attracted by her womanly energy; an unfaithful husband who regrets their lost love; an inhibited stranger; an old college roommate; an uncomprehending foreigner. The strategy is dangerous in its tendency to endorse the already vigorous narcissim of these women. Yet Adams is clearly fascinated by the ways people find to imagine themselves, or their lovers, or their parents, as strangers do. And frequently too the result is love deflected toward strangers.

In "For Good" a twelve-year-old girl goes to a party with her father and stepmother, and learns that the hostess was once his mistress. The girl is drawn to this distressed woman far more deeply than to her own mother. When the woman drunkenly embraces a guest and says, "Ah, my long-lost love, why couldn't everything last?", the girl hears real desperation in this stagy remark. It's the stranger, seldom the parent or spouse, who releases the deeper emotions of Adams' characters. The oddly-

[2] BEAUTIFUL GIRL, by *Alice Adams*. Knopf. $8.95.

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matched couple in "A Jealous Husband" restore their shaky relationship, and their own self-esteem, when she drifts into an affair with a black man. Jealousy, the husband learns, can be both erotic and narcotic. The beautiful rich woman in "Flights" has been scarred in the car accident that killed her previous husband; now she's vacationing with her next (a young, aggressive television producer) on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. She would be another sulky-glamorous American bitch if it weren't for the way we see her, through the dazzled eyes of a young, withdrawn resort-keeper. He's a perfect stranger who understands her inmost thoughts, intuits her fears, and suffers her pain; moreover, she understands him instantly, and deeply. Why is it that only strangers can be so perfect? A much better story, "Winter Rain," describes the maturing of a young woman spending a year in Paris. She rents from a nasty old phoney-elegant Madame who frustratingly refuses to be the friend or surrogate mother the girl wishes for. Unwittingly, Madame confirms and strengthens the girl's identity. There should be more strangers like this in Adams' world.

At their best these stories explore complex relationships in a quick, deceptively offhand manner. They tend to begin with a tense problem (a wife dying, a divorce impending, a moment of wrath, an anxious move to a new place) and unravel gradually, without much climax except a muted sense of recovered balance and diminished expectation. What's too often missing is a final criticism. The woman in "Home Is Where" has a splendid summer romance when she returns to North Carolina to decide about a divorce; but the romance ends, the man goes off to become famous, she marries someone else. One feels neither gladness nor sorrow in such conclusions, but rather an implicit appeal of stylish melancholy: "And later I married the other man, and later still I almost got used to being happy." In "A Pale and Perfectly Oval Moon" the weak husband remembers his complex and difficult wife as "the most remarkable and interesting woman I've ever known." But she's dead now, and he never could convince her in life. Alas, I suppose. These closures seem mostly attempts at elegant gesture. I prefer the ending of "Beautiful Girl" where the former love murmurs consolingly in the drunken woman's ear, "I want you to be my beautiful girl again," and she raises her head abruptly: " 'I am a beautiful girl,' she rasps out, furiously."

Donald Barthelme used to do his looking backward irreverently, but now it has turned mostly to sadness.[3] He still composes the most elegant and sophisticated stories around; his ear is mercilessly exact, his parodic gift miraculous, his fantasy charming, his diction limpidly clear and fine. But his great days are over. Searching for a new form, something that will startle into being some new questions, he offers in this new collection a series of seven colloquies, or dialogues for two voices. Sandwiched in the middle are nine other miscellaneous pieces. Unfortunately the new form—zany catechism, verbal detritus, butt ends of someone's days and ways—sounds like the old Barthelme doing a take-off on *Waiting for Godot.*

[3] GREAT DAYS, by *Donald Barthelme.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $7.95.

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In "The Crisis" we listen to two voices describe a recent revolution that was to have shaken the land, but the language is so jargon-flat that no revolution is imaginable: "We feel [says one voice] only 25 percent of what we ought to feel, according to recent findings. I know that 'ought' is a loaded word, in this context." Second voice, a moment later: "The raid on the okra fields was not a success; the rebel answering service just hisses." Then the first voice consoles itself by saying that the failed revolution has at least "turned us once again toward the kinds of questions that deserve serious attention." And so on: superb technique in service of a waning sense of humor. It now smacks sometimes of Monty Python.

Barthelme's art has always been a form of verbal collage, outrageous rearrangements of familiar things, designed to criticize and instruct even as they entertain. Too many of the new pieces, however, simply remind us of his noble progenitors: Joyce in the catechism section of *Ulysses,* Kafka in *The Castle* (cf. Barthelme's "On the Steps of the Conservatory"), Beckett in *Watt* or *Godot* (cf. "The Leap"), Eliot in *The Waste Land* (cf. "Morning"). The final colloquy, "Great Days," laments the losses of love and faith in language reminiscent of both Molly Bloom and Gerontion. The elegiac strain Barthelme tries for, despite all his japes and motley, seems borrowed; the great days are not really his own. Two characters in another story suggest the problem:

> "It's good," Kate said. "I could do without the irony."
> "Me too," Elise said. "I could do without the irony."

Barthelme's unremitting self-consciousness has become, even to him I suspect, tiresome; but he has made irony—the impulse to send up anything, everything—into a twitch.

The trouble is, without irony Barthelme verges upon the sentimental. Two stories in the older manner strike me, now that they are reprinted here, as oddly soft. "Tales of the Swedish Army" postulates a sweetly inept young Swedish soldier named Bengt, on maneuvers in Manhattan (where else?), who follows the story's narrator home and suffers an appalling series of abuses. Moral: the narrator is us, and the Swede is the trusting romantic we fail to be, a throwback to the charming sort of eager spirit we once saw in the Chocolate Soldier in *Arms and the Man.* Yet this stick figure out of the past supposedly makes the present seem tawdy and mean. Similarly, "The Death of Edward Lear" suggests the death of imagination, sympathy, passion. Barthelme postulates the poet's death as a zany, mystifying performance nobody understands. The agony of dying becomes "a series of actions the meaning of which was obscure to the spectators." So the event is turned into a popular play, a sterile social ritual which enjoys long runs and many revivals. Lear, however, refuses to remain wholly embalmed; in just one version the maverick spirit survives, "shouting, shaking, vibrant with rage." The problem here is that Barthelme's romanticized poet—raging, let us say, against the dying of the light—is just as hackneyed as its supposed antithesis.

Let's turn back to nature. Howard Frank Mosher tells stories of Ver-

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monters up near the Canadian line, where he lives, and writes with such authority as to suggest he's recording contemporary history.[4] The first sketch in his collection describes a girl hitch-hiking who turns out to be a hillbilly singer from Alabama. The issue is whether her magnetism will outpull the beautiful mountains, trees, home. It doesn't. Another story concerns a boy whose passion to race his '49 Chevvy leads him to heroic battle against every obstacle of man and nature. Mosher seems to be doing, in fiction, what John McPhee does in his articles about birchbark canoe-makers, denizens of the Pine Barrens, or Alaskan pioneers: that is, celebrating the character of our contemporaries who are closer to nature and the knowledge of survival than we are. Wallace Stegner is quoted on the dust jacket in praise of Mosher's voice: "it's new—nobody ever did these people or this country before." The implication is misleading, however; the material isn't new. As one reads into the collection it becomes clear that the references to recent things—like black bikinis and '49 Chevvies—have quietly disappeared and we find ourselves amongst bootleggers, loggers, truck drivers and lumberjacks during the drought of 1927. Nor is that year very important: these are changeless woods, the only time is seasonal, and death becomes natural transformation.

Mosher's characters are not really new either: they hark back through Faulkner's Ike McCaslin to Thoreau's coarse Indians and voyageurs in *The Maine Woods* and to Cooper's Leatherstocking ruffian. These old Vermonters are engaged in the most elemental and symbolic actions: proving courage in nature, rejecting the town laws, defying the whole Power Company and its hydroelectric dam, spurning every modern device, preserving the sacred laws of hunting and woodsmanship. Mosher's craft is to tell these familiar stories as if they were not romantic fables at all but purely episodes of local history. They are scrupulously made, clean of affectation as newly-planed boards, and subtly mortised and tenoned. Occasionally, through the restraint and humor, we can hear a romanticizing, Faulknerian voice:

> The dawn after the day the ice went out of the pond, men and women came ten and fifteen and twenty miles in mud up to the hubs of their wagon wheels to stand in freezing rain or sleet or sugar snow on the bluff at the end of the country road, waiting in pearly-gray tableau for the terrific roar high in the notch signifying that the gate in the driving dam had been raised. . . . A wall of water would appear between the cliffs, cresting over the spring white water, followed closely by thousands of fifty-two-foot logs hurtling down out of the dawn fog.

Mosher's stories get their inspiration not from contemporary Vermont but from our all-too-favorite myths about American Adams, frontier simplicities, and renunciatory virtues. With that fine eye for landscape and an excellent ear for the dialects he knows, Mosher should stop looking backward and give his attention to contemporary Vermont.

[4] WHERE THE RIVERS FLOW NORTH, by *Howard Frank Mosher.* Viking. $8.95.

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Doris Grumbach's elegantly-written fourth novel begins at the Centennial of 1876.[5] It is the personal narrative of a woman in her nineties, looking back on her life as the wife of a famous American composer, pianist, and teacher, Robert Maclaren. They meet at a recital in Boston, marry hurriedly and go to live in Frankfurt with his mother. While his career flourishes the marriage becomes an agony. Loathed by the mother-in-law, ignored by the composer, Caroline Maclaren learns to suffer in silence and to hate Germany. Told with unaffected simplicity, the story seems an authentic document. Returning to Boston in 1888, Maclaren's fame and productivity continue but he becomes increasingly withdrawn, morbidly sensitive, subject to violent rages. Repressed homosexuality is hinted. The couple retires to Saratoga Springs and his mental illness now becomes physical. At Columbia to receive an honorary degree, he suffers a mental breakdown and dies horribly within a few years. His death is a rebirth for his wife, who launches a musician's colony in his name, falls in love with a young woman, and lives happily for another decade until further disaster brings the story to an end.

I rehearse all these details in order to suggest something of the peculiarly historical feeling of this novel. It all echoes fact: Maclaren's portrait derives from the composer-pianist-teacher Edward MacDowell (1861–1908). His widow gave their Peterborough, New Hampshire home for an artist's colony. The Saratoga Springs mansion of Mrs. Katrina Peabody was given for Yaddo, another such colony. Not surprisingly, we find on the acknowledgements page that Grumbach has worked at both places. Here she makes a very odd statement: "The Maclaren Community is imaginary and bears no relation to places it may resemble." I am aware of the sort of thing lawyers advise, but "bears *no* relation"? Obviously the novel depends greatly on its significant resemblance to these well-known institutions and their originators. The conception of an alternative version of the life of a famous American composer, whose private existence was a grotesque torment for all who knew it, has everything to do with its relation to presupposed facts. Unlike some recent novelists like E. L. Doctorow and Robert Coover, Grumbach does not play fast and loose with fact, probability, or possibility. If I read it correctly, *Chamber Music* is an attempt to conjecture—with all due decorum—what the life of Mrs. MacDowell or a woman like her must have been. The novel offers itself as a version of history just as authentic as the official one. I think it deserves a place beside the works of Kate Chopin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

James Schuyler sets his novel in such an anonymous middle-class world that, except for a few details about marijuana and Antabuse, it could have taken place anytime in the last forty years.[6] He collaborated with John Ashbery on his second novel, *A Nest of Ninnies,* but he should have saved that title for his third. Schuyler is a poet and critic but these sophistications do not mar his novel. Its sardonic scenes of domestic life, made up almost entirely of dialogue, center upon Lottie Taylor, a middle-aged

[5] CHAMBER MUSIC, by *Doris Grumbach.* Dutton. $8.95.
[6] WHAT'S FOR DINNER? by *James Schuyler.* Black Sparrow Press. $10.00.

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alcoholic, and her husband Norris, who considers himself a wit. Childless, they keep a basset hound whose inconvenient drool requires a dribble cloth. To dinner come the Delahantys, an even more conventional crew: Maureen and Bryan, their huge and hungry twin boys, Bryan's tedious mother Biddy, and their cat Twing. Schuyler constructs his novel out of all the little rituals of polite society: having friends for dinner, playing bridge, drinking, making conversation, calling on the phone "just to say hello," teaching the young to mind their manners, visiting hospitals, managing an affair, minding other people's business. Nothing much happens; Lottie dries out in the hospital for a while and gets some therapy; Norris has a quick low-temperature affair with a fluttery widow he doesn't like; the Delahantys practice hypocrisy on their children; the twins buy marijuana; Biddy dies. The relish is all in what they find to say to each other

[Lottie:] "I wonder what you'll do when I'm gone. Are you planning to remarry?"

[Norris:] "What's for dinner?"

[Lottie:] "I suppose you'll go on some sort of trip and meet somebody so it's no good trying to figure out who you'll pick. Meat loaf."

[Norris:] "Perhaps I intend to predecease you."

Each character can be known instantly from a few words. Biddy: "Do you know what I collect, boys? Happiness, that's what I collect." Bryan's clichés run on slightly different lines: "I'd rather have them drink in front of me than behind my back." Maureen likes to hide her claws: "My stars, is that eleven years ago? I remember so well going to see you in the hospital and when I got home the twins were sickening with scarletina. I was so afraid I might have given it to you, in your weakened condition."

The style is reminiscent of Jarrell's *Pictures from an Institution;* nobody escapes the condemning banality of his own words. Schuyler plays off the polite behavior against a series of hospital scenes where, in group therapy, Lottie and Norris and a medley of other ill-assorted couples let down their hair a bit. Gradually one comes to prefer the hospital to the parlors of the civilized. Clichés thrive there just as well, but people more often say what they think. A certain Mr. Carson, who has tried suicide, is advised to try playing cards or take up a craft. "Ever made any moccasins, Carson?" says the group's mocker. "If you haven't, now's your big chance." The novel offers no cures, only a skeptical picture of the enclosed self. Although Schuyler celebrates the disruptive impulses, the quick ironic swipes we take at each other, the therapeutic moments of desire or anger, he shows that in the end these amount to little more than shaking the bars of a comfortable cage.

The most interesting coup attempted in John Updike's new novel is the violent overthrow of the middle-class American mind that has tyrannized

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his fiction ever since *The Poorhouse Fair.*[7] Naturally, the coup is unsuccessful. Updike loves what he attacks. Nobody can describe with such critical affection the drug stores or living rooms or breakfast cereals of America. And the more Updike's protagonist, the black despot Colonel Hakim Felix Ellelloû of Kush, rails against America, the more fatally attractive it becomes—to us if not to him. Here he is, listening to jukebox music that took twenty years to reach his sub-Saharan outpost of progress:

> Over and over, hearty, hollowly healthy voices blended with violins toward an uplifted climax of pre-rock wail, ululant submission to the patriotic, economic call to sublimate. "Love Me Tender," the youthful Presley requested; "Cry Me a River," Johnny Ray begged; "Que Sera Sera," Doris Day philosophized, her voice snagging each time on some thorn in my soul. . . . And when the whistling section of "The River Kwai March" penetrated us, we knew, knew in our bones, that we would win the Cold War.

So Updike finds his devious way, through the elaborate invention of a contemporary African state and its ambivalent leader, back to the Fifties when all the fun was. He relocates his Olinger and Tarbox in rural Wisconsin, whither his African hero has drifted for education and indoctrination in the American Way. The town Ellelloû remembers is Franchise, Wisconsin; its college is McCarthy (Joseph, of course, not Eugene); its awful materialism is touching, its liberalism craven, its ignorance bliss. Not all of Updike's anti-American *saeva indignatio*—and this book seems at first loaded with it—can hide his ultimate love. Updike in mufti is still Updike.

He travelled in Africa as a Fulbright Lecturer in 1973. A page of acknowledgements refers to thirteen writers of African history, travellers' accounts from Mungo Park all the way to *The National Geographic,* consultation with professors, books on the Sahel Drought and on Islam. Yet none of this careful research weighs heavily on the novel; its illusion of place seems almost palpable, kinesthetic, dazzling. In fact, Kush becomes almost too good, a feat of sheer stylistic exuberance tending to overpower everything else. Never before has Updike been so orotund as this:

> The pisé rectangles of Istiqlal, their monotony of dried mud broken in the center of town by the wooden facades of Indian storefronts, a-swirl with Arabic and Hindi, and the concrete-and-glass abominations flauntingly imposed, before the Revolution, by the French and, since, by the East Germans, soon dissolved—once the tin shantytown of resettled nomads was behind us—into the low, somehow liquid horizon, its stony dun slumber scarcely disturbed by a distant cluster of thatched roofs encircled by euphorbia, or by the sullen looming of a roadside hovel, a rusted can on a stick advertising the poisonous and interdicted native beer.

[7] THE COUP, by *John Updike.* Knopf. $8.95.

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There are moments when these cadenced periods, and their subject matter, echo the manner of Garcia-Marquez in *Autumn of the Patriarch,* as in this description of the "endless corridors" of the Palais d'Administration: "In the perpetual dusk of these halls soldiers saluted the dictator as he passed, and their whores with a whimper and a swirl of their rags hid in the doorways of offices become barracks."

Updike takes us into the drought-stricken wastes of his region with undeniable excitement. Kush, whose flag is a plain green field, opens up in his imagination the notion of a sublime vacancy, an intractable emptiness. No coup, apparently, can touch it. Ellelloû's theory goes that "A state such as Kush is too thin to be administered except by gestures." His own ascent to power had its full complement of absurdities: "There was nothing to revolutionize." Despite its history, we are told, Kush remains a land of "delicate, delectable emptiness."

Now there is a bloodless coup, and it forms the only significant plot of the novel: beautifully barren Kush is being fertilized (seduced, despoiled) with the gross national products of the West: transitor radios, IBM typewriters, Japanese sandals, elastic underwear called Lollypop and Spanky, rock music, the golden parabolas of MacDonalds, the Mercedes-Benz, Bic pens, Ovaltine, sunglasses, Perrier water, petrochemical products, split-level houses, shopping centers, administrative efficiency, and all the rest of over-packaged mass-marketed prosperity. Against this invidious and invisible enemy Ellelloû hurls all his rhetorical fury, in a hopelessly windy Jeremiad riddled by self-doubt. Through his Koran-quoting hero Updike clearly wishes to preach a moral: that the Western world invented by American protestants and Adam Smith has succeeded in making the whole planet spiritually dead. Saith the preacher,

> in the attenuation, desiccation, and death of religions the world over, a new religion is being formed in the indistinct hearts of men, a religion without God, without prohibitions and compensatory assurances . . . whose one rite is the exercise of energy, and in which exhausted forms like the quest, the vow, the expiation, and the attainment through suffering of wisdom are, emptied of content, put in the service of a pervasive expenditure . . . whose immediate reward is fatigue, a blameless confusion, and sleep.

These free-floating sentiments bear a striking resemblance to the sermons in *A Month of Sundays,* another tale of a hypocrite. The trouble here seems to be that Updike cannot really embrace his own theme. His black despot is too white, his hatred too soft, ambivalent and cowardly. Wonderfully contemptuous at first, Ellelloû comes out like every other Updike anti-hero. He's a rueful Westerner at heart, and his middle name is Happiness. Wrath and indignation dissolve at the end in comfortable jokes. Anticipating sex with his third wife as he sends her children off to school, Ellelloû murmurs a thankful prayer for "free public education, the cornerstone of participatory democracy and domestic bliss."

For a writer who makes so much of conscience, Updike's work seems to

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me increasingly devoid of it. Style has become everything. Just as Kush remains a land of illusory gestures, so is fatherless Ellelloû born of the wind and elusive as windy rhetoric. "Does there not pass over man a space of time when his life is a blank?" runs Updike's epigraph from *The Koran.* Ironically, that noble phrase becomes a way to excuse the hero—and the author behind him—from having to *be* anyone. He enjoys nonentity; in disguise as a street beggar he will sing, "A land without conscience is an empty land/ a blasted land, a desert land . . . ," but he wants to be free to play every other role as well, from national leader to vagrant orange-seller, short-order cook, token black, well-digger, polygamous husband, keeper of mistresses. Such shapeshifting could be effective if we could find its logic. But in both technical and moral senses, the narrator of this preachy novel does not have a character.

Nowhere does this void show more conspicuously than in the characterization of women. The same black African mask that liberates in Updike so much scorn for decadent America releases at the same time a brackish stream of misogyny. We can blame it on the ambivalences and frustrations of poor old Ellelloû, but I think he's a stooge. The women are either blurry assemblages of erotic swirls, crescents, globes and ringlets, or else shrilly-metallic bitches with murder in their voices and lipstick-flecks on their incisors. The appealing ones, like the tall Sittina (a perfect Nefertiti) or Sheba (petite and even more perfect than that), all sound exactly alike and have no human reality; they are fleshy fantasies, embodying "the African woman's sublime though deceptive attitude of subservience." The bitches can be at least quite funny, despite their unremitting selfishness, stupidity and cruelty, when they spit venom at Ellelloû:

> "My adored [he says], I have come to bid thee good-bye. I am about to walk the edge of my fate, and may fall off."
>
> "Don't give me any of this Kismet crap, [says his American wife] I knew you when you couldn't tell the Koran from the Sears Roebuck catalogue."

Mainly these creatures are supposed to goad Ellelloû and inspire our fear and disgust. They show in yet another way that *The Coup* amounts finally to a brilliant verbal escapade whose purported criticism and flashy displays of conscience are at once sentimental, irresponsible, and even a bit vicious.

Dan Jacobson, a writer of far less talent than Updike, has written another sort of confession set in an unromanticized mythical state—the grimly regimented East European Republic of Sarmeda.[8] Jacobson's austere narrative follows out with the clarity of a syllogism its chilling logic. As a newly-conscripted soldier, Josef Baisz finds himself through a series of absurd chances and petty enmities in a position to betray a friend. When he does so, the effect stuns him:

[8] THE CONFESSIONS OF JOSEF BAISZ, by *Dan Jacobson.* Harper & Row. $10.00.

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> Everyone had got Judas wrong! That was my great discovery. When he pressed his lips to the master's, he did it passionately, with a breaking heart and expectant eye, full of excitement and curiosity, trembling with pity. . . . He was one of those who loved only what he betrayed; who could love only through betrayal.

And Baisz is another. We follow his appalling career with fascination because its psychology and politics ring so true.

There is never any question about Jacobson endorsing his hero or using him as a stand-in. Baisz reveals himself with terrifyingly flat honesty. Whether he tells of his excitement in tormenting a kitten or in destroying a fourteen-year-old boy, his confessions remain at an emotional dead level. But the flatness can express cynicism, irony, anger in a flash: "There is an iron law that applies to people who live in places like Vliss [where Baisz was born]. The wider their horizons, the narrower their minds." Occasionally too the style suggests a luminous duplicity about the whole phenomenal world: "passenger trains moving across dark fields at midnight, like so many visionary streets; roads and fences always about to start the trek to remote horizons; the stare of strangers, wondering at the improbable conjunction of their lives with mine. . . . " The book suffers from predictability of character types, outside of the narrator, and situations; the cost, it would seem, of Baisz's violent and reductive temperament appears in his contemptuously narrowed vision. Yet his fate too turns out to lie in the despised past.

Bernard Malamud's latest novel curiously looks back to his first, *The Natural,* in its elaborate literary framework.[9] It was Malamud's amusing game in 1952 to correlate a baseball team and its woes with the symbolism and personae of *The Waste Land.* The allusions proved both the young writer's seriousness and his subtle craftsmanship. In *Dubin's Lives* the literary counterpoint becomes even more important. The hero is a fifty-seven-year old biographer, married, successful, and engaged in writing a life of D. H. Lawrence, when he falls into a somewhat Lawrencian affair with a young woman. When he finds his own experiences beginning to echo Lawrence's, his struggles to write the book become his struggles to understand his own life. Dubin's previous biography of Thoreau (whom he calls "a dybbuk of the woods"!) helps him to define his earlier idealistic self, so there are frequent references to that life as well. Still other references come from all the famous biographies Dubin has studied (Freud, Carlyle, Samuel Johnson, Montaigne, Cellini, St. Augustine) and written (Twain, Lincoln, Keats among these). In short, he has learned to live through all these other lives, both figuratively and—when he comes to write them himself—literally. He has come to live mainly through reliving the experiences of others. Once a young woman who suffers Dubin a lift tells him, out of the blue, about her impotent husband. " 'A shame,' Dubin replied. 'The composer Mahler was helped in similar circumstances by a long walk with Freud in Leiden—that's in Holland.' " O learned, helpful Dubin!

[9] DUBIN'S LIVES, by *Bernard Malamud.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $10.00.

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Malamud's problem is to turn this shy creature of literary allusion and note-cards into an approximately Lawrencian lover. If he does not succeed in that, at least he approaches it. The difficulty is roughly equivalent to transforming Malamud himself from a sad-eyed ironist of human suffering (the great short story writer he essentially has been) into an unself-conscious celebrant of the Self (a sort of novelist he has never been, although he tried hard in *A New Life*). It makes for a very mixed performance: uneasy in rhythm, tonally jarring, unintentionally funny, boring yet suspenseful, deeply ambivalent. But most of the old irony is gone. Dubin refuses to become the sad and bitter clown, the Malamudian stereotype. Often the situation begs for comedy: Dubin, a city boy at heart, jogging the wintry roads of Vermont or upstate New York in carefully-buckled galoshes; Dubin, deep into "blood-consciousness, blood-being, and blood-soul," worrying about the shadeless windows with a synagogue across the street; Dubin caught spying on his beloved and held at bay by a labrador retriever; Dubin stung by a bee; Dubin impotent. But Malamud does not play these scenes for laughter. When Dubin dons bell-bottoms, blazer, and panama hat, *he* thinks the cigarillo in his mouth the finishing touch (I think of Groucho Marx).

When Malamud tries for ironic comedy, however, he fails miserably. A long episode in Venice where Dubin tries, expensively, to consummate his desire only proves him an idiot and her a slut. When the tone would seem to call for lyricism, Malamud sours it: in a field of daisies Dubin takes his lover at last, muttering to himself, "This evens it . . . for the cruel winter." Rarely does Malamud manage to shake free of this sourness into something sensuous, fully felt and explored. Fanny Bick, the young woman (named, she says, for Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*), emerges with convincing pride and intelligence and a sympathetic need for father, lover, and friend (she's closer to Keats's Fanny Brawne than Austen's character). Dubin's wife Kitty seems even more finely observed in her self-doubt, anger, desperate hopefulness, integrity, and never-wholly-deceived awareness. Their two grown-up children—Maud looking for Meaningful Existence in San Francisco, Gerald gone AWOL in Sweden—are somewhat Jamesian additions. Not wholly convincing in themselves, they bring out Dubin's fatherly nature, its goodness and its limits, and thus deepen his entanglement with the past.

Undeniably there are *longueurs* in this life: a winter of penance that drags on long after the imagination boggles, and enough episodes of Dubin jogging from bed to bed to make us doubt his stamina as much as his patience. Yet for all that he learns more about love than any other Malamud hero. He sacrifices much of his "character" in doing so, but as the epigraph from Thoreau says, "What demon possessed me that I behaved so well?" What's more, he learns from experience, not words. Hesitating, racked by shame and guilt, he risks hell, not because he feels like playing around but because he never before risked knowing himself, his own life, apart from Others.

Yet the story still goes against Malamud's grain. He never sounds like more than a polite visitor in nature, is never at home describing his characters' sexual experiences. The synagogue is always just across the street,

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and prayers for the dead rise irresistibly to his lips. Dubin's soul speaks through his intelligence and memory, not through his phallus. The life of Lawrence offers no real instruction, for Dubin's life or for the novel. For every moment of celebration, there are pages of sorrow and apology. As one character puts it, "there is little serious changing of self in life, no matter what one knows. Who knows how to change? It comes or it doesn't." So Dubin, literary to the last, begins his final chapter with an allusion that expresses simply what the whole novel has been struggling to confess:

> He remembered Dr. Johnson in the marketplace at Uttoxeter, standing bareheaded in the rain where his father's bookstall had been. Years before, the old bookseller, ailing that day, has asked his son to go to his place and the son had refused. "Pride prevented me." Fifty years later Samuel Johnson, an old man, laboriously journeyed to the market and stood an hour in the rain by the stall his father had once used, to do for the dead man what he hadn't done.

It is a vulgar error to suppose a novel is only a species of autobiography and that its narrator or hero "really is" the author, but in the case of Charles Simmons' masterful new work one may commit the error with impunity.[10] It will dawn on any reader that the man pictured on the dust jacket probably *is* (so far as anyone ever is) the man describing himself in the book, but that does not essentially matter. Our interest lies wholly in what Simmons has done with that self and in how he has seen it *sub specie aeternatis*.

His inspiration is a unique narrative method. Each of the book's forty brief segments begins in the past tense of childhood and youth, moves to the present tense of a man in his fifties, and ends with a few sentences projecting his future. A single theme governs each four-page entry: sleep, doctors, a friend, clowning, love, bosses, death, honesty, drink, animals, his face, ambitions, movies, religion. The order seems at first just that random. Each theme may appear clearly or it may not: what numbers meant to him as a child, as a youth, as a man now, and what they will soon mean as he nears death—an obvious theme. Others—like experiences of giving, the miscellaneous objects one keeps, projecting and throwing things, forms of locomotion—resist neat classification but charm by their unexpectedly clear logic. Gradually all these fragments coalesce and the character of the man emerges: aggressive, intelligent, impatient, ruthlessly self-critical, selfish, isolated, principled, a bit of a show-off, superior, intensely verbal, wounded, fair-minded, dismissive. His childhood sounds no more stressful than usual, but his struggles in love and marriage and divorce convey more anguish than most. And his increasing sense of isolation, of diminishing energies and failing desires, suggest something like despair. The segment on ambitions, for example, ends as follows:

[10] WRINKLES, by *Charles Simmons*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $8.95.

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> Some years after the end of his marriage he fell in love. The experience so loosened his feelings that he hoped to write warmly of people, but he still has pity only for himself and a strong sense of grievance against others. Eventually he will understand that most people have as hard a time in life as he. He will try to make literature from this understanding, but he will not be able to do so.

The segment on time concludes, "Near the end of his life he will be able to do whatever he wants with his time, civilization and nature having lost interest in him." The segment on romance predicts, "She will fall in love with a young widower and leave him. His strongest feelings thereafter will be toward his daughters and toward young men who remind him of his past self." He is a man obsessed by time and age, searching to put his past in order in grim preparation for the final wrinkle.

Yet Simmons' ruthless honesty is not finally despairing. The past yields skein after skein of associated memories. True, remembering can be full of traps for him, an equal opportunity to recall pain as well as pleasure, humiliation as well as joy. But his sense of logical, irresistible progressions in a life has a final, settling effect. There are no great judgments to be made, especially not about good and evil, he decides; but there are moments, things, people, traits, and feelings that can be remembered with a luminous intensity and placed in their right relation to the present and the future.

Simmons writes of himself in a style of scrupulous meanness, a fact which may be ultimately more important than his innovative use of tenses. He uses no paragraphs, only the simplest sentences, the fewest adjectives, the plainest terms. Sometimes each sentence is an event, a concise sequence of fact and motion. "He gave up knives in high school, and in the army all weapons became repugnant to him." Or: "When he told his mother a joke she would say it was funny but not laugh." Or: "He had his first adulterous affair with a woman who said his scars made him look dangerous, although later she said that his constant concern with his appearance was faggy." Simmons never asks for any feeling, never intrudes a comment. In the most personal of subjects and the most idiosyncratic experiences, he remains impersonal. Never, to my knowledge, has an autobiographical novelist cast such a cold eye on himself. His book is no melancholy looking backward or regretful picking up the pieces but a work of art triumphant over life.

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GEORGE S. LENSING

Bridges Redivivus

ROBERT BRIDGES IS ALMOST FORGOTTEN TODAY, although Robert Hillyer has called *The Testament of Beauty* "one of the great philosophical poems of the world," and Yvor Winters found "nothing greater in English poetry and there is little as great" as Bridges' "Low Barometer." *In the Classic Mode: The Achievement of Robert Bridges*[1] is Donald E. Stanford's deliberate attempt to restore the former poet-laureate to favor: "But tastes change, and almost fifty years after Bridges's death, there are a few signs that there may be a revival of interest in the work of the distinguished poet and in what he stood for." The book recalls Donald Davie's *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* published a few years ago. Both Davie and Stanford regret the influential eccentricities of Pound and Eliot, preferring instead the calmer, steadier and more traditional mode exemplified by Hardy and Bridges. The poetic convulsions inaugurated by the obstreperous American experimenters a half century ago, however, seem tame enough today—academically sanctioned and traditional in their own right as they now appear. It is true that *The Testament of Beauty,* published in 1929 on Bridges' eighty-fifth birthday, was eclipsed by *The Waste Land, Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and the early *Cantos, Harmonium,* and *The Tower,* all of which had appeared earlier. No general study of Bridges' career has been undertaken since the one by Albert Guérard in 1942. For these reasons, Stanford's critical reappraisal and his edition of selected poems[2] are a timely assist in the rehabilitation of a poet who deserves better in the ebb and flow of taste and recognition.

Stanford pleads strongly for Bridges' classicism ("The poem should have unity, coherence, and a logically demonstrable structure and be expressed in a language that had beauty without sentimentality and power without sensationalism or vulgarity"), but Bridges' poetry was also self-consciously experimental, and it is in this element of his work that I found Stanford's remarks especially revealing. Two major circumstances in the poet's life help to account for his spirit of innovation, and I wish to review them here briefly: his friendship for over a quarter of a century with Gerard Manley Hopkins and his even longer interest in prosody.

Bridges is largely remembered today as the editor of the first edition of Hopkins' poems in 1918, almost thirty years after the priest-poet's death. The two were contemporaries, however, Hopkins born three months before Bridges in 1844. They met as undergraduates at Oxford and sealed a surprisingly strong friendship that survived intense oppositions. Unfortunately, our knowledge of their association is based only upon Hopkins' correspondence to Bridges, the latter having destroyed his side of the ex-

[1] IN THE CLASSIC MODE: THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ROBERT BRIDGES, by *Donald E. Stanford.* University of Delaware Press. $22.00.

[2] ROBERT BRIDGES, SELECTED POEMS, edited by *Donald E. Stanford.* Dufour Editions.

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change when his letters were returned to him after Hopkins' death. When Hopkins visited Bridges and his family at Rochdale for three weeks in the summer before their graduation he was already resolved on his conversion to Roman Catholicism, though he mentioned nothing of it to Bridges at the time. Bridges' own conventional and somewhat waning Anglicanism looked upon the decision with dismay ("Within the peach-clad walls that old outlaw,/ The Roman wolf, snatches with privy paw," he later wrote in "Elegy: The Summer-House on the Mound"). Bridges elected a career in medicine, while Hopkins chose the ministry of a Jesuit priest. They met occasionally, though their political and religious differences exacerbated the strains upon their communication. In 1875, for example, Bridges was reading Hegel and Hopkins Duns Scotus, and the base of their friendship was in danger of dissolving altogether. But Hopkins came across some of Bridges' newly published poems, a sudden and unexpected discovery. By 1877, a vigorous and candid exchange of letters had begun, offering detailed and critical comments by each on the poems of the other. It was a correspondence that was to have enormous implications for both poets, and if Bridges had not preserved his copies of Hopkins' poems the work of the latter would have remained unknown. What is less widely appreciated is the influence of Hopkins upon Bridges' own work. In 1879, for example, Bridges sent his friend a draft of "Thou didst delight my eyes" beginning:

> Thou didst delight my eyes:
> Yet who am I? nor best
> Nor first nor last to test
> Thy charm, thy bloom to prize. . . .

Hopkins had a suggestion for the lines, one he typically put in the strongest terms: "Could you get rid of *test* in 'Thou didst delight'? Look here: rhyme on *first* and *durst* and you will get something very good. I dare not tell you my thought, for it wd. be to defeat my own purpose, but do it yourself, simple, suitable and sweet." While Bridges did not always adopt his friend's suggestions, he often did and this poem appeared with the rhyme proposed by Hopkins. Echoes of Hopkins began to appear in several of his poems, as Stanford points out. Two lines from Bridges' "London Snow":

> Or peering up from under the white-mossed wonder,
> 'O look at the trees!'; they cried, 'O look at the trees!'

echo *The Wreck of the Deutschland* ("Since, tho' he is under the world's splendour and wonder") and "The Starlight Night" ("Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!"). "The hill pines were sighing," described by Stanford as "a very mild form of accentual verse," may owe something else to Hopkins. The latter's felled aspens in "Binsey Poplars" and Bridges' later "stroke/ Of the iron axe" felling an oak both decry lyrically the wanton destruction of nature.

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Such borrowings and echoes are minor, however; the importance of Hopkins' influence on Bridges has more to do with his adaptations of Hopkins' sprung rhythm, a prosody based upon the number of accents per line with an unlimited number of unaccented syllables. Independently, both Bridges and Hopkins were studying Milton's experiments in accentual verse, but Bridges' attention to Hopkins' *The Wreck of the Deutschland* prompted his own experiments in that meter. The syntax and poetic license of Hopkins' poem exasperated him and he said as much, even constructing a parody of the poem, to which Hopkins responded, "Your parody reassures me about your understanding the metre." According to Stanford, however, Bridges went on to publish about twenty poems in accentual verse. Some of them, like "London Snow," "On a Dead Child" and "The Voice of Nature," are among the best known in Bridges' canon. When his 1880 *Poems* appeared, he added a note explaining the "new prosody" and his own indebtedness to "a friend, whose poems remain . . . in manuscript":

> The poems in the smaller type, like those similarly distinguished in the author's last series, are written by the rules of a new prosody, which may well exist by the side of the old. It is left to the judgment of the reader: but the author hopes that these verses will be read with attention to the natural quantity and accent of the syllables—for these are the interpretation of the rhythm—and not with the notion that all accents in poetry are alternate with unaccented syllables, nor with the almost universal prejudice that when two or more unaccented syllables intervene between two accented syllables the former must suffer and be slurred over: a prejudice which probably arises from the common misuse of unaccented for short syllables. . . .
>
> The author disavows any claim to originality for the novelty: this is almost entirely due to a friend, whose poems remain, he regrets to say, in manuscript.

Stanford rightly notes that Bridges' use of accentual meter is less absolute, more "subtle and cautious," than Hopkins'. The Jesuit tried, in fact, to break more radically Bridges' tendency to preserve conventional feet in accentual poems like "London Snow": "I suppose you scan 'The éye márvelled—márvelled at the dázzling whíteness; the éar héarkened to the stíllness of the sólemn áir': this is well enough when seen, but the following is easier to catch and somewhat better in itself—'Eye márvelled—márvelled át the dázzling whíteness; ear héarkened to the stíllness ín the sólemn áir.' " Protecting the soothing cadence of his poem, Bridges had the good judgment to disregard the advice. In his *Robert Bridges and Gerard Hopkins,* Jean-Georges Ritz summarizes the inclination of each to pull the other over to his own preference: "Just as Hopkins tried to divert Bridges from too much preciosity and smoothness, and led him towards an independent use of sprung rhythm, so Bridges tried to lead Hopkins to a gradual rejection of wildness and eccentricities." Neither ultimately suc-

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ceeded, though Hopkins had opened up to Bridges the prospects of metrical variation and experimentation.

Ten years after Hopkins' death, Bridges began his experiments in classical prosody, largely under the influence of another friend, William Johnson Stone. Stone died in 1901 at the age of twenty-eight, having exacted a promise from Bridges to continue his experiments based upon quantitative syllabic length rather than accents. One such poem, "*Ibant Obscuri,*" is a line-by-line paraphrase of the *Aeneid,* 6. 268-751, 893-898. Stanford astutely demonstrates the closeness with which Bridges imitates Virgil's quantitative verse by juxtaposing selections from Dryden's translation with the same ones rendered by Bridges. Bridges is far more scrupulous in adhering to the original, both in meter and diction.

By the beginning of the 1920s Bridges was aware that a new poetry was emerging in England and America, and he saw his own continuing metrical exercises as one with the new spirit of innovation. To R. C. Trevelyan he wrote in 1926: "I agree with the Free versifiers that the old humdrum is worn out: but I am quite orthodox in believing that freedom must be within prosody not without it." Toward the end of his life that prosody evolved into his "neo-Miltonic syllabics." Returning to his study of *Samson Agonistes,* and especially the choruses, Bridges developed a prosodic system based upon the number of syllables per line; added syllables are justified by elision. Like his adaptations of sprung rhythm, accents are irregular in relation to unaccented syllables. Unlike sprung rhythm, there is no limitation to the number of stresses per line. Bridges called varying the accents "freeing the feet"—enabling a poem to approximate the looseness of colloquial speech within a syllabic limitation. In his 1922 essay "Humdrum and Harum-Scarum," Bridges argued that "in carrying on Milton's inventions in the syllabic verse there is better hope of successful progress than in the technique of free verse as I understand it." His poem "Poor Pol," written in the previous year, demonstrates the experiment humorously, adopting the "loose Alexandrines" that would be used in the later writing of *The Testament of Beauty.* He addresses the parrot:

> I am writing verses to you & grieve that you sh'd be
> *absolument incapable de les comprendre,*
> *tu, Polle, nescis ista nec potes scire:—*
> Alas! Iambic, scazon and alexandrine,
> spondee or choriamb, all is alike to you—
> my well-continued fanciful experiment
> wherein so many strange verses amalgamate
> on the secure bedrock of Milton's prosody.

The same neo-Miltonic syllabics insured the improvisatory tone of *The Testament of Beauty,* where Bridges experimented further in a revised orthography based upon phonetic consistency.

In one of his experiments in "loose Alexandrines," "The Tapestry," there is a description of dawn that rivals, and indeed exceeds, many of the

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contemporary Imagist exercises. The advance of color accompanying the rising sun evolves with the modulations of a Turner canvas:

> *What if I had not seen the cloths of Night take hue*
> soft-tinged as of brown bear-skin or green opal spread
> which still persisting through shift imperceptible
> grew to an incandescent copper on a pale light-blue!
> Then one flame-yellow streak pierced thru' the molten bronze
> with lilac freak'd above, where fiëry in red mist
> the orb with slow surprise surged, till his whole blank blaze
> dispell'd from out his path all colour—and Day began.

The shifting but cumulative progress of color between "cloths of Night" and the surge of sun "fiëry in red mist" is contained in the neo-Miltonic syllabics. The power of the description grows by tonal contrasts (the "incandescent copper" set upon a "pale light-blue," for example), subtle metaphor ("cloths of Night" becoming "brown bear-skin" and "green opal spread," where the latter word is both noun [cloth] and participle [covered]), and, most of all, rhythmic and other sound variations. The last two lines cited end with the phrases "whole blank blaze" and "and Day began": the spondees of one balancing the iambs of the other, even as the vowels rime in a subtle inversion or order, blank/began and blaze/Day. The whole passage is part of a larger apology for beauty, but it summarizes Bridges' powers of description, prosody, and mental play.

In the Classical Mode offers a succinct summary of Bridges' varying prosodic theories; it also provides the first extended essay on Bridges as a critic, and, for the two masques and eight plays, a detailed treatment of Bridges' adaptations of Roman history, Terence, Homer and Calderón. For the first time, the trial texts for *The Testament of Beauty* are used to show how the long philosophical poem was revised, especially for metrical or stylistic reasons. The study reaffirms Bridges' adherence to classical decorum, rational consistency, and formulated prosody. At the same time, it singles out the long-lived friend of Hopkins and poet-laureate for his inveterate experimentation and his resolution to be "modern" within limitations. Though Pound would not have been satisfied, Bridges too could make it new. Like Williams, Bridges was a physician, and his "On a Dead Child" is at once as literal and poignant as "By the road to the contagious hospital." *In the Classic Mode* allows Bridges to emerge as both traditionalist and modernist, the balance on which he deserves to be reread today.

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VERNON YOUNG

From Ken-Speckle to a Pig in a Poke

"They [the Tales] are a panorama which remains ken-speckle upon the mental retina."
—Sir Richard Francis Burton, in his *Essay on the Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night.*

THE FAIRY TALE IS A CRUCIBLE OF DELIGHT and, if you care, a vessel of instruction: it epitomizes all the powers of life which define for us the course of destiny as we prefer to imagine it, robbed of final castastrophe or anti-climax. It accompanies our earliest steps into a world we later call that of literature, in which we are introduced to a society we suspect does not exist but is likely to be more gratifying than the one we inhabit: more gratifying, more beautiful, even more cruel—but the cruelty in it is reconciled by the beauty and by a system of rewards and punishments we fail to question closely until we are grown and rational. Upon returning to these tales, after the age of innocence, we may have to admit that the seeming inequities are obscurely just.

Among the Grimm Fairy Tales, which Pamela Travers, in her review of the Pantheon edition, 1944, called "this one book—other than the Bible—that has truly made Western man," there is a short, disquieting tale, *Frau Trude.* A young peasant girl, suspicious of old Frau Trude's nocturnal visitors, no less than of the hag herself, is so indiscreet as to intimate her suspicions. Whereupon, the witch—for so she is—changes the girl into a block of wood and throws her on the fire. Warming herself at the mounting blaze, she cackles contentedly, "That shines bright for once in a way." And the story ends: no wizard, prince or dwarf to the rescue, no retribution for the witch. For the wretched girl's fate, the sole justification is the brief opening description of her as "obstinately inquisitive."

To be curious is to be damned. And how confidently will a present-day reader rush to deny that here we have a rustic miniature of the Prometheus or Faust legend? They open vistas, these stories, but we should not be eager to reread them as sermons in disguise (at least, I should not) if they had not the essential rudiments of the story-teller's art: a setting, a social hierarchy, an inherited rhythm in the structure of the telling, a mesmerizing repetition of motifs and an invariable *object* (as Padraic Colum has expressed it, "They put a *thing* in the center of the story") which returns the eye and the ear to an informing correlation: the golden slipper in *Cinderella;* the looking-glass of the Wicked Queen in *Snow-White;* the spindle in *Briar Rose;* the long hair in *Rapunzel;* the Juniper Tree in the tale of that name. They are not quite "timeless"; the form in which we receive them has been historically and culturally modified. At which moment, it would be interesting to learn, did *Frau Trude* enter that chronology of tales which had been accumulating for perhaps a thousand years before the Thirty Years' War? Might it be as old as the forests of Germany after the Goths had moved in, before a touch of chivalry from Celtic romance which might have contrived saving spells for the girl, or could it have been a late-comer when, as the Age of Reason (and Calvin-

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ism) dawned, the folk and fairy tales were stricken at the source or rendered fanatical and, in Spengler's immortal sentence, "Witches were burned because they were *proved,* not because they were seen in the air o' nights"—?

Setting, for my mind's eye, is indispensable; the more I compare notes, the more I realize that our mature reaction to the fairy tale—indeed, our *consent* to react—is wholly conditioned by our cultural experience of it. My personal associations with the fairy tale (the fable, the legend, the adventure story) are inseparable from a place, a teller, a ceremony in my early childhood; so much so that I can't cleanly sort one epiphany from another: the church in red-and-white, snow and Christmas carols; Bible stories told by our vicar in his own words (impeccable and without cant); visits to Battle Abbey; *Robin Hood* reenacted under the oaks of Sussex; *Beauty and The Beast* performed (by our matrons and prefects) in the Vicarage; pantomimes in London (i.e. *Ali Baba* or *Cinderella* staged by professional actors *for* children). All overlap. I am unable to distinguish, in retrospect, Christian ethic from Royalist *noblesse oblige,* Christian miracle from the Good Fairy—or Nuremberg from Bexhill-on-Sea! It took me half a lifetime to discover that there *is* such a town as Hameln, site of my earliest favorite story (favored because, I suppose, under the aspect of pathos, poetic justice was done and I was early a friend of the dramatic proprieties!). As soon as I could arrange it, I went there. *Unwahrscheinlich!*—there it was as I had dreamed it: encircled, it is true, by a modern *clump,* where electrical units and baking powder are manufactured; but within that circle, the Hameln of my story-book illustrations: the half-timbered houses, the belfries, the *Rattenfängerhaus,* powdered with snow, as it happened. Lovely! and quite hair-raising. That year, Hameln was still in the "British Zone"; no giant-size imagination was demanded to recall the late Happenings when a piper had again presented his unpaid bill and half the population had disappeared under a mountain! . . . . . This, if not the only, is the ideal way to recapitulate the fairy tale on your pulses and if you were a Grimm child Germany and Austria are more prolific for you than England and Wales with survivals of the dark tower, the walled town and the moated grange.

Of all this I find no trace in Roger Sale's book[1]: no spectacular enchantments, no alien milieu, present or distantly sighted (save in *Kim*); no castled towns, no Hallowe'en. Neither goblins nor unawakened princesses are much to Mr. Sale's liking and history is too unpalatable an affair to be long conjured as the matrix of generic legend. His title is misleading; plainly, it is the *And After* that turns him on, rather than the originals. By roughing in the Fairy Tale, proper, and some elegant variants of the 17th century, he appears to have been doing his duty by his publisher or his Department; he surveys the territory but chooses not to embrace it. Although he insists, at length and glumly, on the broken continuity whereby *the child* became a special object for whom animal and fairy sto-

[1] FAIRY TALES AND AFTER: From Snow White to E.B. White, by *Roger Sale.* Harvard University Press. $11.00.

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ries were written, with an adult (mainly Victorian) preconception of what constituted the child, in the long run he approves of the specialization. Why else, if, as he says, it "seemed important to concentrate on books with which [he felt] some marked imaginative sympathy," would he devote fully half his investigation to tales of Kenneth Grahame, Beatrix Potter, L. Frank Baum, Walter R. Brooks and E. B. White? Patently, none of these was designed for adults. His inclusion of *Kim* seems incongruous to me (except that it includes animals and Mr. Sale favors the animal world, when thoroughly domesticated); if *Kim,* why not *Treasure Island* or *Robin Hood* or the *Arabian Nights,* none of which receives a mention? Here, Mr. Sale is no help, for he doesn't make clear how old he, or his children (who have partly determined his choice), were when they read the several stories. (I must say that the reader for most of this stuff would have had to be born yesterday!) Mr. Sale fittingly approaches *Kim* as if it were a social novel but the other fables, in which cats are shopkeepers and frogs drive motor-cars, cannot support such an approach and his attempt to give them all the solemn English Department treatment leads him into strange and puckered moments.

Mr. Sale is half aware that national distinctions account for something but his effort at defining them is very odd. Dr. Seuss, obviously a hero to him, is emblematically American not only for his "guying at monarchies" but also for "his uninquisitive sense that evil is probably nothing more than someone acting like a naughty child." One wonders what Hawthorne or Melville might have made of such a definition. Mr. Sale subsequently assures us that he himself, was "a daylight reader, seeking to live in a daylight world." Very healthy, I'm sure, but it raises a problem; if he was never tempted by nor deeply feared the dark, he failed to appreciate those insights which can be earned only at the heart of darkness. Jean de Brunhoff, author of the *Babar* stories, is distinctively French, in Mr. Sale's reading of him, because he is "passive, civilized, both aware of the anthropomorphism implicit in racism and racist himself, never enjoying a plot and never likely to yield to the temptations of melodrama." Much seems to be going on in that sentence, under cover, which had best be left obscure; as a description of the generic Frenchman, the terminal statement is wild, recklessly disposing of a few million nationals raised on Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Guy de Maupassant, Prosper Merimée, Gaston Leroux, Jules Verne and Georges Simenon! A. A. Milne, whom Mr. Sale once loved but later rejected, is "an arrested child" [who] "believes that if one learns how things are done, and named, and spelled, everything will turn out all right." Well, that's not a bad beginning for a coherent life in society. If Mr. Sale intended this as a profile of the Englishman at large—forgive my smile—he was clumsily forgetting his previous (or later, depending on whether he wrote his introduction first or last) commitment to four British writers who claim a lion's share of his book (Carroll, Grahame, Kipling and Potter).

Perhaps he was avenging himself for the confession wrung from him as he ground out the lesson of "growing up" which "the snobbish Milne" had nonetheless instilled.

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> So they went off together. But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest, a little boy and his Bear will always be playing.

To these, the closing sentences of *The House at Pooh Corner,* Mr. Sale adds:

> I do not think it particularly sentimental of me that I still find it hard to say these words without beginning to cry [he does not think it *particularly* sentimental!] though I am aware that my tears are for the lost boy I was who also wept over them. The lies they tell are known to be lies, and that saves everything. Pooh and Christopher Robin do not go away together and we know it. The Forest is forever closed, except to the memory, and that is not a sentimental fact.

Must I remind an English teacher that a fact *cannot* be sentimental? Sentimentality is an attitude. His final remark, quoted, is *no* kind of fact; if I may push the monomyth, The Forest is never closed, which an attentive reading of Grimm would reveal.

Throughout these pages, Mr. Sale employs a bewildering diversity of tone. One is never sure how securely, in the books he examines, he is displaying the reasons for their appeal to a child reader, how far he is using the literature as autobiography, to what extent he is exercising his prerogative as a democratic literary critic for whom all material is impartially enfranchised. Mr. Sale finds it "unfortunately true" that for many people the justification of criticism is its elucidation "of what would otherwise be obscure and there is nothing obscure . . . . about *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* or *The Wizard of Oz.*" Why is this "unfortunately true"? Because, to someone who is at that moment launched on elucidating the un-obscure, it is inescapably embarrassing? To my ear, many of Mr. Sale's critiques hover at the border of parody; often they cross the border. Pocketing the ethical content of *The Wind in the Willows,* he surmises:

> Perhaps he [Toad] is chastened at last, but the book must end lamely since a chastened Toad is of no interest; and the unchastened Toad has had too many tales told of him already. In *The Sun Also Rises,* Hemingway handles his outsider insider, Robert Cohn, with greater tact and never allows Cohn to occupy the center of the stage, as Grahame does . . . .

You just can't *do* that! Criticism, like art, has due scale and perspective. Disparate modes of being or of expression my run parallel; they can only be merged at the price of absurdity. Mr. Sale has no greater fear of sounding absurd than he has of seeming sentimental. I should prefer not to think of his concluding essay, "Two Pigs," as conclusive in any other way, for it brings his subject to the zenith of bathos (or can bathos have only a nadir?). The most immediate instance of my discomfort is *Charlotte's Web;* its hero is a pig, being fattened for slaughter without knowing

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it, comforted by the farmer's daughter, Fern, and by Charlotte, a spider the size of a gumdrop who, in the event, dies before he does, leaving him lachrymose but impenitently eating. Before this juncture is an interlude when Wilbur (the pig) awaits a visit from Fern; since it is raining, he fears she will not come. Mr. Sale, goaded to sadness by Wilbur's ordeal, has this (and much more) to say.

> As I write this I watch my cat, staring out the window on a rainy morning. Usually he goes outside and sniffs about in the yard at this time but he hates rain. Is he lonely, bored, disappointed? . . . . certainly if he feels something like these feelings, he does not respond to them with the same impatience or mournfulness that I would. But when I read about Wilbur's loneliness I think I don't understand my cat very clearly because my patience and imagination are weak. Think what a long day it would be—"I have no real friend here in the barn, it's going to rain all morning and all afternoon and Fern won't come in such bad weather."

If you were telling this to a five-year-old, I suppose this might be one way of explicating the text. *I* am trying to visualize Mr. Sale reading his paper to a seminar of English professors and graduate students, wiping away their tears as the Seattle rain darkens their window-panes.

Where are we? Far, far, from a "ken-speckle panorama" that comprises the vengeful chafe of time, the hour-glass and the scattered bones, the thousand and one palaces in which golden-haired ephebes are immured or caliphs reign for a day, the dragons with two hundred teeth, the children of Hameln shivering into oblivion at the beck of pipes. We are in the fairyland of Suburban Renewal, with a pig-in-clover mooning over a dead teenage spider, where poetry, having lost the obscure atavisms, the consciousness of the malevolent, the shadow and the alchemy, can only become poesy or a bucolic anecdote. Mr. Sale will find on page 453 of Daryl Hines's *The Poetry Anthology,* 1912–1977, a happily recovered poem by Robert Siegel entitled "Ego." Mr. Siegel's purpose may not have been identical with that of a children's-story writer, but his vignette is a vital challenge. Here is some of it:

> Has thrust his nose under every board,
> smelt out every wild carrot and white grub
> . . . . chuffs down the white meal
> raising a cloud around his ears, and cleans
> each cob with the nicety of a Pharisee
>
> tooth for tooth, squeezing contentedly
> his small bagpipe voice as he mashes
> corn with a slobbery leer and leaves
> turds like cannonballs across a battlefield.
> Meanwhile his little pink eye is
> periscoped on the main chance—

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the gate ajar, the slipped board,
the stray duck that flusters through the wire—
saliva hanging from his mouth like a crown jewel.
. . . .

That is a pig! Exactly as Ted Hughes's otter is an otter and his thrush a thrush, undreamed of by Kenneth Grahame or E. B. White. Mr. Sale has missed the most fruitful vein of the fairy-tale and beast-fable heritage; it is in the poetry of our time. I think of Jarrell's terrifying *Märchen* poems, and Howard Moss as mouthpiece for King Midas, or Daryl Hine for Bluebeard's wife; Gene Baro's whimsical defence (in "Lament For Better and Worse") of Medusa with insomnia, of princesses who "perhaps are shrieking and not shrinking," of an ogre with an ulcer; of Sylvia Plath's underleaf and unnerving world of mushrooms and moles; of the scathing, marvellous Fairy Tales of Anne Sexton. I don't know what the anxious anatomists are exposing these days as they fumble Anne Sexton's tripes but when the disinterments are completed I hope someone recognizes that her fairy tales, *as poems,* are not only food for speculation on the sources of her *angst* but also are among the best she ever wrote, tough-minded and musical.

And then there is James Thurber. I might chafe yet remain tolerant at the omission of anybody else from a treatise on the fairy tale; to exclude Thurber, the winning fabulist of our day, I would name an act of treason. Mr. Sale refers to him once, passingly; for reasons that required an explanation, he never gets back to him. On grounds of pedagogy alone—since Mr. Sale seems very exercised about the constructive content of tales for children—he could have credited *The Wonderful O* with being the most inventive and painless vocabulary builder in the world of didactic works for the kiddies. Not primarily concerned with the instructive aspect of these fables, my exemplary Thurber fairy tale is *The Thirteen Clocks.* This small masterpiece of respectful travesty honors the whole spectrum of the traditions: the castle where the dark Duke has killed Time, the fair princess and her princely suitor, the triad-form of contest and reward—these are European at root; the sudden rhyming within the prose line, which was an Arabian contribution; the pseudo-Elizabethan or just Thurberian argot—"I'll slit him from his guggle to his zatch!"; the syntax that mates with itself, as in Lewis Carroll—"He called himself Xingu, which was not his name, and dangerous, since the name began with X—and still does."

There remains the prose text, incomparably euphuistic, as it should be.

> It was cold on Hagga's hill, and fresh with furrows where the dragging points of stars had plowed the fields. A peasant in a purple smock stalked the smoking furrows, sowing seeds. There was a smell, the Golux thought, a little like Forever in the air, but mixed with something faint and less enduring, possibly the fragrance of a flower.

or this:

> "Is the Duke afraid of laughter?" asked the Prince. "The Duke is not

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afraid of anything. Not even" said the guard, "The Todal." "The Todal?" "The Todal." "What's the Todal?" A lock of the guard's hair turned white and his teeth began to chatter. "The Todal looks like a blob of glup" he said. "It makes a sound like rabbits screaming, and smells of old, unopened rooms."

If I have committed the key solecism of the reviewer by implying that Mr. Sale should have written another book than the one he wrote, I plead the Duke's excuse. "We all have flaws," he said, "mine is being wicked."

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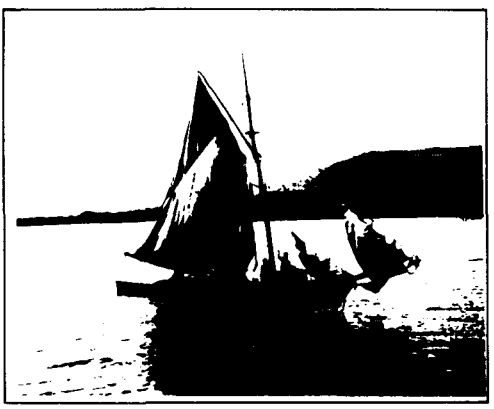

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